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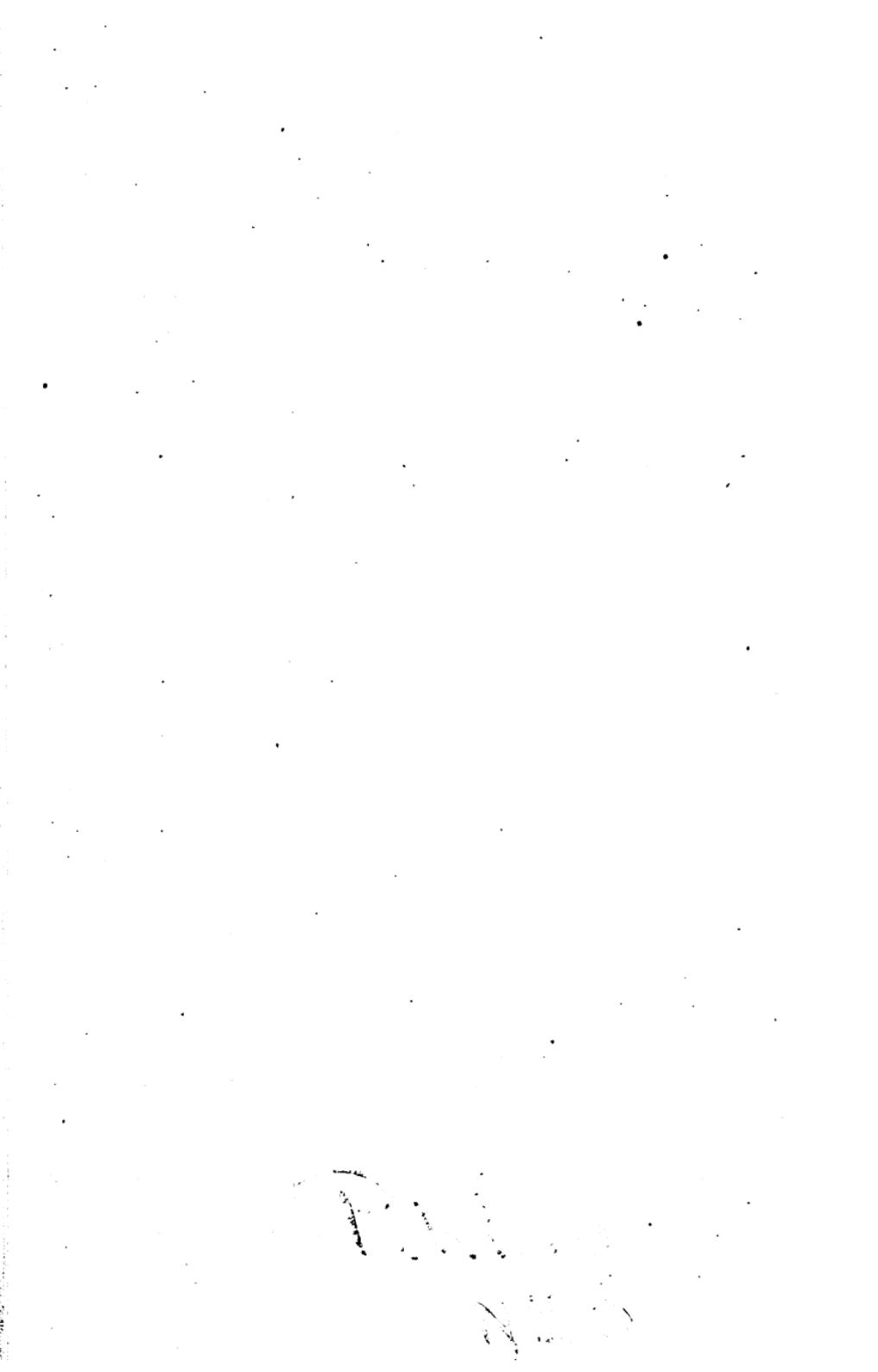
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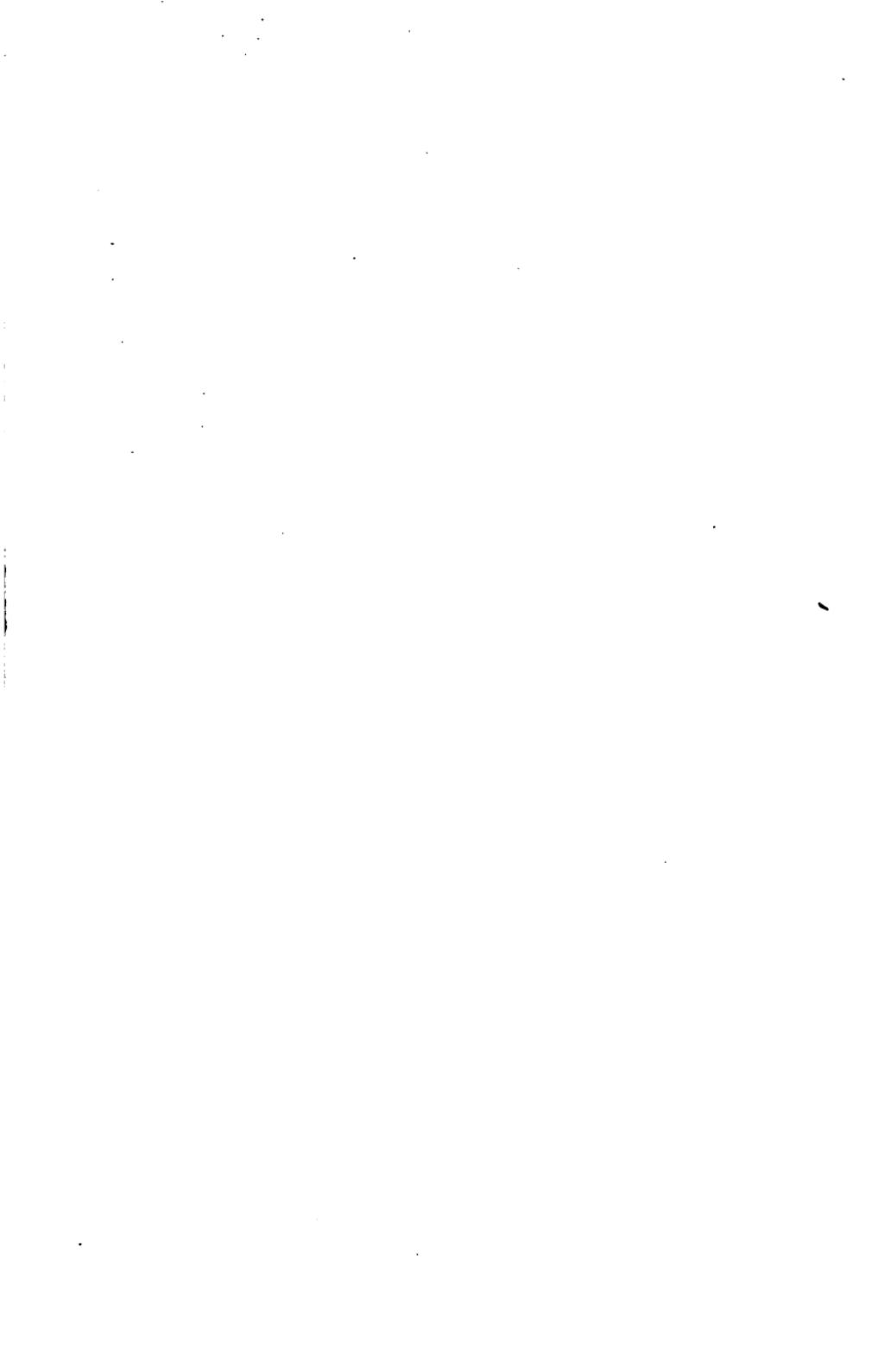
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THE GILDED CHRYSALIS





CICELY

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C.

THE GILDED CHRYSALIS

A NOVEL

BY
GERTRUDE PAHLOW



NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY
1914

M. S. M. - BOSTON
PRINTING
1914



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NAOMI WILSON
OLIVERA
VIAZELLI

TO E. P. W.

A book is like a friend, and a friend is like a book;
Each a true-heart lover for a lamp-lit ingle-nook:
So take from me this book, and be to me a friend
(O best of true-heart lovers!) till our book shall end.

1928

SEP

TRANSFER FROM C. O.

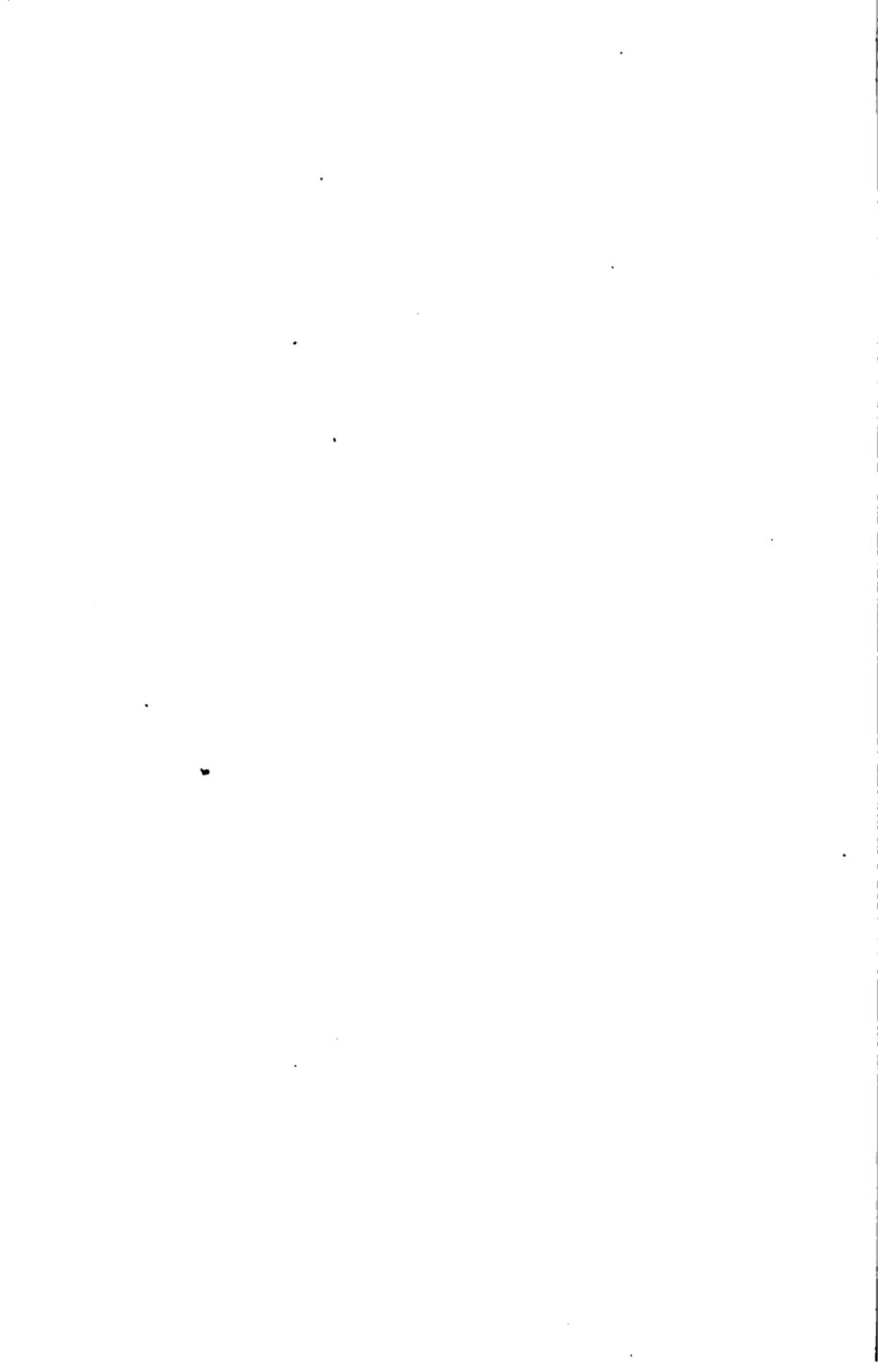


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THE GILDED CHRYSALIS



THE GILDED CHRYSALIS

I

THE INAUGURATION OF A CAREER

THE train pulled slowly, through an avenue of yellowing autumn leaves, up the grade towards the little town; and Roger Ford, leaning forward in his chair, laid his hand eagerly on his bride's arm.

"We're almost there, Cicely!" he said. "Almost home!"

"Really?" exclaimed Cicely. "Hallelujah! I thought it would never happen."

"So did I," said Roger, drawing a deep breath. "I've thought of it,—and despaired of it,—so long! And now you're here. You in Cheltenham, sweetheart!"

"How do I fit the picture?" asked Cicely, cocking her head at him.

"Perfectly, of course," said Roger. "You'd fit any picture." He looked at her with shining eyes of love and pride, and then, craning his neck, peered along the train's path towards the place that was the other mistress of his heart. For the first time a faint misgiving, that

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perhaps had been lingering beneath the surface of his mind, smote him consciously. "You fit it perfectly, of course," he reiterated firmly; and looked again at her with dawning doubt. He had always known that his wife was ineffable, unique among mortals; but now that they neared the grave old academic town it suddenly seemed that there might be more of a difference between her and the other faculty wives than could be accounted for by her celestial attributes alone. Was it all in her bright beauty and perfect Parisian clothes? A puzzled wrinkle came between his brows.

"Chel-tenham!" called a raucous voice at the end of the car, as the train came to a standstill.

"Chel-tenham!" repeated Cicely gaily. "Out with you, Roger! Boots, saddle, to horse and away!" And without waiting for him to rise, she sped to the door and ran down the steps to the platform. "That's the way to hurry big slow men!" she said, as he caught up with her,—"run, and they'll run after you; it's inevitable, it's the Fourth Law of Motion. Where are the taxis?"

"Oh, taxis!" said Roger, laughing. "Why, a taxi that found itself in Cheltenham would explode with the shock. You've come down to the bed rock of low living and high thinking, dear."

"But — no *taxis*, Roger!" exclaimed Cicely. "Why, I always thought this was the country above all others for comfort. In Paris people used to say, 'Oh, the Americans — ! they are not mortals, they are millionaires!' I'm sure whenever we came back to New York there were *taxis* enough."

Roger laughed again, half-heartedly. "Cheltenham's

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not New York, as you'll very soon find! And college people aren't millionaires,— you know I've told you that until you said you were tired of hearing it. You've lived in such a different world from this, sweetheart, you come here almost a foreigner. I hope you're not going to find the naturalizing too hard." He gazed at her anxiously, his blue eyes and sober, square-chinned face full of a boyish wistfulness that was oddly appealing in so big a man.

"Well," said Cicely, with a little frowning shrug, "wishing won't save shoe-leather. If there aren't any decent cabs we must walk. Give the bags to one of these moth-eaten charioteers, Roger, and take me away before their eyes pop out. I had no idea America was like this."

Roger consigned the luggage to one of the hovering cabmen, and guided his wife from the platform towards the main street of the village. His face was clouded and distressed. In all his home-comings it had never occurred to him to picture Cheltenham other than what it was; his own instincts were of an almost ascetic simplicity, which the staid academic standards more than satisfied, and he was constitutionally unimaginative about material things. He tried, in silence, to readjust his viewpoint to that of his luxuriously nurtured bride, and failed entirely. Cicely too went silently, the little wrinkle of puzzled annoyance still on her forehead. The rusty cabmen stared after them with candid curiosity and admiration.

The village of Cheltenham strayed up from the station through a fringe of little shabby shops, past a section

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of peaceful, pretty residence streets, to the great central enclosure of the university which was its reason for being. This was a golden day of late September, with the air washed and clear, the leaves motionless, the grass still thick and strongly green. The shops were stirring from their summer sleep into a state of fussy bustle, men in shirt-sleeves tugging violently at boxes, men in more stately raiment agitatedly placing college-room furniture in winning arrangements outside the doorways. Along the sidewalks the college boys strolled noisily, shouting joyful greetings from group to group. Lawns were being trimmed and raked, houses set wide to the sun; all the cheerful small excitement of the opening of college was under way, and Cheltenham was alive.

Up through the town went Roger and Cicely,—she, in her pearl-grey frock with the long gloves and little gaiters to match, and her scarlet hat and ruff, like a bright bird-of-Paradise in a dun-coloured aviary; his sober blue serge and lack of adornment more in keeping than at any time since the wedding-day,—and at the end of the main street the campus confronted them in the splendour of the faultless morning. Roger paused before the great carved gate to let his first love break gloriously upon the vision of his second, and Cicely, peering in, gave an exclamation. The place showed in a bravery and beauty even greater than common; the green-piled velvet of the lawns was flooded with gold, the dark brick of the old-time buildings, gleaming between the clusters of uprushing ivy, had a sombre preciousness as of porphyry; the newer halls stood solid and majestic in the warm light that yellowed their grey

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stone, and deepened the shadows under their rich carving. About the tall tower in the centre pigeons wheeled and circled with low cries, and across the grass knots of boys, arms around shoulders in the joy of reunion, strayed singing. It was a picture both stately and exquisite, sumptuous with the splendour of intelligent costliness, and charming with the charm of intimate human things.

The wrinkle vanished from Cicely's forehead. "There!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "I *knew* America couldn't be so different! Why, this is beautiful; it's the most beautiful university I've ever seen. It's a little like Oxford and a little like Cambridge, and rather nicer than either."

"You like it!" said Roger. He turned to her a transfigured face; like many big, untalkative men, he had beneath his outward armour of reserve a depth and intensity of emotion that, once liberated, broke through with astonishing force. "You don't know how happy that makes me, sweetheart!"

"I love it," said Cicely decidedly. "I'm always going to live in Cheltenham. What's that exquisite monastery-looking building, with the cloister in the middle?"

"That's the senior dormitory," said Roger. "Bully, isn't it? All the underclassmen look up to it like a sort of heaven. Jove, how I loved that place! The first night I got in I was too happy to sleep."

Cicely flashed at him, in a swift, sweet glance, the half-jealous, half-maternal tenderness of a woman towards the youth of her lover. "I wish I'd seen you, darling boy," she murmured. Then, with a swift reversion to her everyday tone, "Who lives in those ducky little rooms

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at the base of the tower? One of the dons?" she asked.

"No, that's an institution of Cheltenham's own,— one of our finest," explained Roger eagerly. "The janitor of the tower lives there; it's one of the jobs reserved for fellows who are working their way through, and they give him those rooms so his life shan't be robbed of beauty. Isn't that fine?"

"Fine?" repeated Cicely, frowning. "I think it's silly. What an idea, to put a scrubby janitor in dirty overalls into those charming rooms! And who lives in that sumptuous Gothic chapel,— the charwomen, I suppose?"

"You narrow-minded aristocrat! it's about time you came home!" said Roger, laughing. "That's the debating-hall; nothing lives there but the college spirit." He hesitated a moment, looking around the dear enclosure with eyes a little dulled by disappointment. "Perhaps we'd better postpone the rest of college," he suggested. "Don't you want to see where Mr. and Mrs. Roger Endicott Ford live?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Cicely. "I've been wild to see it ever since there was such a place; and now I want to more than ever, since I find Cheltenham so beautiful. Come, let's hurry; *marchons!*"

Roger brightened again. "Yes, let's hurry!" he echoed eagerly. "This way; it isn't far. Cicely— think of it—we're going home!"

Cicely flashed her swift smile at him, and they fell into rapid step. Roger, too elated and excited for speech, hurried her faster and faster; across the main thoroughfare, up a side avenue, and around a corner they

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went; and then came to a sudden stop in a narrow by-street. Before them was a little old house of red brick, square and low, with small white-framed windows, and two worn stone steps leading up to a green door. Twin box-trees stood sentinel on opposite sides of the little yard, and marigolds, with round cheery faces, bordered the narrow brick path. It was very neat, very quaint, and very humble.

“There!” said Roger, with a gesture of triumph.

“This — you don’t mean *this* is it?” exclaimed Cicely, in a tone from which astonishment had wiped all expression.

“This is it!” answered Roger, glowing. “Our own home; our very own, dearest!”

Cicely caught her breath. “Our — home!” she repeated; and stood staring.

Like most American girls of her class, Cicely had been well and conscientiously trained to be a *débutante*. Nature had begun the noble work by making her very, very lovely; and Art had ably seconded by teaching her to speak fluently about nothing in four languages, to dance charmingly, and to dress with the utmost expensiveness consistent with good taste. Orphaned in her early girlhood, she had been taken into the home of her uncle the Ambassador to France, and there, under the able supervision of the Ambassadress, had laid the glossy finish of a woman of the world on the raw material of a young girl’s ignorance. Then, having achieved the end for which she had been created and shaped by making a successful *début*, she had so far forgotten herself as to fall headlong in love without any consideration of expedi-

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ency: and now she was marching blithely into surroundings different from any she had ever known, and responsibilities which her imagination had never been trained to conceive, to display in real life a real character of which she was herself completely ignorant. The mental processes of the parents and guardians who provide such armour for the battle may possibly be understood by an all-wise Providence, though the matter is open to doubt. It is true that the Ambassador had had a moment of misgiving, in which he had suggested to his wife that Cicely's upbringing had perhaps hardly fitted her for usefulness in the sphere she was to occupy: but his wife (who was busy with the launching of three plain daughters, and extremely glad to have her beautiful niece out of the way), had reminded him that Cicely had had every possible advantage, exactly the same training as their own girls, and one of the handsomest trousseaux of the year; and was therefore ready for anything.

So Cicely, equipped for life with every possible advantage, stood and gazed at the little house that was her future home, and shivered.

As for Roger, he was afame with pride and happiness. To own a house at all is a deal of a feat for academic men; and his American-trained eyes were blinded by long habit to the discrepancy between the lodging of our universities and the lodging of the men who give them life. This fruit of his toil and his dreams seemed to him a very fine affair. He had equipped and arranged it himself,—with a little connivance from Mrs. Davidson, the wife of his chief,—at the cost of infinite thought, infinite pains, and much more money than he could afford.

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Now had come the crowning moment, and he was presenting his labour of love to Cicely.

“How do you like it, sweetheart?” he asked her radiantly.

“Why, it’s — it’s —” began Cicely; but she was very young and very candid, and the words caught in her throat and trailed off into silence.

Roger turned and looked at her, and the exultation was struck out of his face as if by a blow. Was this the glorious homecoming he had pictured so many times? She had averted her eyes from the little humble house, and stood looking at the ground; she said nothing, but her lips trembled a little with dismay. A pang of heartsickness rose like a sob within him. He could not speak.

“Let’s go in,” said Cicely, in a constrained voice; and she went up the little steps and stood aside for Roger to unlock the door.

They crossed the threshold in heavy silence, and, standing in the little panelled hall, looked about them. To unprejudiced eyes the place was a pleasant cottage, with a touch of austere charm; the rooms were square and low, softly coloured, furnished a little barely with good mahogany; the modest rugs and draperies were quietly harmonious, and bright brass andirons winked on the empty hearths. But Cicely thought of the tapestried châtelet that had been her idea of love-in-a-cottage; and Roger thought of his months of votive work and radiant dreams: and neither spoke for a long minute.

“So we are to live here,” said Cicely at last.

“Yes,” said Roger huskily. “I’m sorry, dearest.”

“I suppose,” said Cicely, “we couldn’t exchange it for

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£uother. I suppose all those papers we signed mean that we have to keep it."

"I'm afraid so," said Roger. "I—I didn't know, Cicely—I've always seen you in such a different world from this—I never realized that you would bring your own world with you when you came."

"Well," said Cicely, stifling a sigh, "we must make the best of it."

"Yes," said Roger, smothering a great sigh in his turn, "we must just make the best of it." He looked around miserably on his little despised Paradise. "I never understood how much I was asking of you, dear."

"I suppose you couldn't help it," said Cicely. She gave him her hand kindly, and climbed dispiritedly up the little twisting stair.

§

"Cicely!" called Roger, in the hall, an hour later. "Where are you, dearest? Hitty's here."

Cicely came to the top of the stairs, in a coral-pink negligée that made her look like a rosy sea-shell. "Who's Hitty?" she asked, leaning over the banister. "I'm frightfully busy."

"She's the woman I told you about," said Roger, his eyes lighting at the lovely sight of her,—"the cook, or maid, or whatever you call her."

"Oh, a servant!" exclaimed Cicely. "Thank goodness! Send her up, Roger."

Roger hesitated. "If you don't mind, dearest, I think you'd better come down," he said. "She seems to find

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a lot to do; she began to work in the kitchen almost before she got her hat off."

Cicely lifted her eyebrows. "But I have more to do myself than I ever had in my life, Roger!" she said. "I'm unpacking all my clothes. What can she want with me down there?"

"She wants to see you about meals," said Roger. "I hate to bother you, dear, but I'm afraid you'll have to speak to her. And will you have luncheon at one o'clock sharp, please? I'm going over to the laboratory for the rest of the morning, and I have a department meeting at two."

"Very well," answered Cicely. She accepted, without returning, the kiss that he ran up to give her, and stood looking after him as he closed the outer door. "Roger seems to take a good deal for granted!" she said to herself. "Apparently I'm to be all the upper servants rolled into one, and he doesn't object in the least. I had no idea that having an establishment of your own meant worrying and slaving all the time. Roger has very odd ideas." Frowning, she trailed her rosy draperies slowly down the stairs and across the little dining-room, and opened the kitchen door.

"Mis' Ford, I s'pose!" exclaimed a cheerful voice; and an angular woman who was splashing energetically at the sink turned a ruddy face of greeting towards her. "You excuse my not shakin' hands, wun't ye? I'm takin' what my cousin Ellen calls the dishwater mani-cure. These new dishes looked as if they'd ben packed in pig-straw. How are ye,— pretty hearty?"

Cicely stood in the doorway and gazed, too astonished at first to speak. In truth Hitty was as odd a seneschal as could well have been chosen for a bride fresh from the great world; she belonged to a type of servant to be found only in New England, and there, nowadays, in none but the remotest parts. Roger had stumbled upon her during a fishing trip to Maine, and, judging her ability wholly by her kindliness, had bespoken her future services without reflection. Shrewd, voluble, good-natured; as likely herself to be a daughter of the Mayflower as her mistress, and totally unaware of any social difference; innocent of the conventions, and fully equipped only in cleanliness and sociability,—certainly the ambassadorial domestic circle had held nothing like her. But Cicely had, beneath her trained conventionality, a vein of gay independence all her own, which cropped out now and then to free her from the standards of her world; moreover, she hated depression, and was thankful for any aid in escaping it. An appreciative sparkle lighted suddenly in her eyes, and her spirits rose.

"I'm extremely hearty, thank you!" she answered.
"I hope you are the same."

"Well, middlin'," said Hitty. "I'm kind o' dislocated jest now, on account o' travellin' all night in one o' them sleepin'-cars. I got the Professor's telegram at supper-time, an' took the ten o'clock from Bangor; the folks was most all abed when I got on board, an' I turned right in too,—an' my land, if I didn't find out this mornin' that I'd ben sleepin' the hull night all soul alone with sixteen men! Wa'n't that a great note for a respectable woman? However, this life's a vale o'

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tears anyway. Now, what was you calc'latin' to hav for lunch? — the Professor says ye hav dinner at supper-time."

"Why, let me think," said Cicely. "We might have purée of asparagus,— and creamed sweetbreads, and *petits pois sautés*,— and — and squab on toast, and endive salad,— and fruit, and coffee. There's no need for fuss, with just us two."

"Good Father Abraham!" ejaculated Hitty. "Was you expectin' to git all them fixin's out o' *this* kitchin'?"

"Why, yes. Where else?" said Cicely.

"Ye couldn't do it, Mis' Ford," stated Hitty convincingly, "if you was to set an' wait for yore lunch till the Day o' Jedgment. An' ye couldn't then, unless the angel Gabr'el 'd roll up his sleeves an' help out."

"Dear me!" said Cicely, twinkling, "I'd rather not wait that long. What do *you* think of?"

"Why, I was thinkin'," responded Hitty, "o' fish hash."

"Fish hash!" repeated Cicely faintly.

"We could do it easy," explained Hitty reasonably. "This boneless codfish soaks quick, an' I c'n set the potatoes right on now. It'll be all ready, you'll see; I ain't one to raise hopes an' not carry 'em out."

"But, Hitty," protested Cicely, "I *couldn't* eat fish hash. I simply *couldn't*."

"Well, I *couldn't* fix them pure rays o' sparrowgrass you was tellin' about," returned Hitty firmly, "an' that's flat."

"Then I'll try again," said Cicely. "We might have

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plain consommé,— and chicken timbales,— and artichokes, *sauce tartare*,—”

“ Now, Mis’ Ford,” interrupted Hitty, with great impressiveness, “ you put me in mind o’ what I said to Ephr’m Hopkins’ wife (her that was a Green), when she set up housekeepin’. She come from Bangor, chockfull o’ city ways, an’ she wanted mince pie an’ riz dough-nuts an’ fried oysters an’ sech every day in the week. An’ I says to her, ‘ Mis’ Hopkins,’ I says, ‘ if you want to live in the Waldorf Astory, then you’d ought to ‘a’ brought the chief o’ the Waldorf Astory along; but I wa’n’t born no French chief, nor even an Injun one,’ I says, ‘ an’ I don’t much believe I c’n change my nationality for four dollars a week,’ s’ I.”

Cicely burst into merry laughter. “ Brava!” she said. “ I’m sure your conversation is better than anybody’s cooking. Let’s not worry about food now; come upstairs and help me unpack, and entertain me.”

Hitty looked both gratified and doubtful; though she knew that food was her first concern, her social instincts were strong. She hesitated a moment, then, observing cheerfully, “ Well, anythin’ to oblige,” she followed her mistress from the room, stepping gingerly to avoid the long rosy train.

The entire upper floor was littered with trunks, ranging in size from huge many-trayed affairs that had reduced three draymen to the profane silence of exhaustion, to small square hat-trunks that perched about upon the furniture like unwieldy birds. Cicely had skimmed the cream from each, and piled the results helter-skelter in rainbow confusion, until the little house looked like a

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costumer's opening-day. She led the way into the chamber she had chosen for her own.

"Now," she said, "I'll sort the things out, and you put them away. Here's a house-gown; that will go in this closet."

"My land o' liberty!" exclaimed Hitty, holding out the shimmering, exquisitely-embroidered satin in thumbs and forefingers. "Ain't that han'some? You never got that in no Cheltenham store, did ye?"

"No, I'm new to the advantages of Cheltenham," said Cicely. "How does this evening gown strike you,—in your land of liberty, again?" She held up a wonder of silver-shot gauze, the colour of aquamarines, the sheen of moonshine.

"My grief!" ejaculated Hitty, staring. "It looks like a piece o' soapy water. Now *when* was you calc'latin' to wear that?"

"Why, next winter, to parties," said Cicely, tossing it on a chair.

"Next *winter!*" repeated Hitty. "H'm! Ye wun't sweat none. Look a-here, Mis' Ford, what d'ye mean by throwin' them beautiful dresses around like that? This furnitur' ain't ben dusted in a dog's age."

"Hasn't it?" asked Cicely. "Dust it, then, Hitty, will you please?"

Hitty looked dubious. "I do' know, Mis' Ford," she demurred. "General housework's all I hired out for, without no trimmin's."

"But who else is there to do it?" asked Cicely cheerfully. "We have to be dusted, don't we?—and I'm sure there are no trimmings on this furniture!"

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Hitty debated a moment; but her sturdy nature was already succumbing to the compelling charm that made mankind combine to spoil Cicely, and she waived her point. "That's true enough!" she replied, setting to work with her apron in default of other resources. "It's good an' strong, this furnitur' is, but it ain't what ye'd call dressy. I wish't you c'd see my cousin's house, down to Callis! She's got new red plush parlour suits right through, an' lace-edged tidies, an' the biggest chromos you ever see,—Alpion scenes, twelve of 'em. An' she's got her front parlour all petitioned off with parterres, as she calls 'em; an' a pink shell pattern round the zinc where the stove sets; an' two big fat divines, one at each end."

"Divines?" repeated Cicely. "What does she have them in her parlour for,—to hold prayers?"

"Oh, no'm," said Hitty, working rapidly. "To set on."

Cicely looked mystified. "It seems hardly a respectful usage for the cloth," she suggested.

"Oh, the cloth's dreadful strong," said Hitty. "I guess you don't understand. They're really jest sofies, but divines is the stylish name for 'em."

"Oh, I see!" said Cicely, with a smothered chuckle. "I'm rather behind the times. Tell me more, Hitty; haven't you some other relations?"

"Land, yes," said Hitty. "I got folks,—own folks and law-folks,—till the cows come home; but this room's most dusted, an' I guess I better go down an' start the lunch next thing."

"Oh, never mind the luncheon now!" said Cicely.

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"We don't know what we're going to have, yet. Take some of these evening dresses and hang them in the next room,—Mr. Ford's room,—and then tell me about the rest of your family."

Hitty yielded with a certain stiff amenability, and approached the many-coloured mound. "My sakes an' sorriers!" she ejaculated. "Look at that white-of-egg-an'-lemon-jelly one! An' that spider-web trimmed with lightnin'-bugs! My grief! My good land o' Goshen!"

Cicely laughed. "I shan't dare to show you any more, for fear the next will reach your solar plexus!" she said. "You like pretty things, don't you, Hitty?"

"I do; an' I'm used to 'em considerable han'some, though not so thin as these," said Hitty, gathering up an armful and turning to the adjoining room. "My cousin Mirandy, that lived next door to us, hed a black silk an' a red poplin an' a blue challis all to once, besides her every-day clo'es an' calikers. My, that woman hed it easy! Her husband, he hed a steady job at fifty dollars a month, an' his house besides, an' he give her everythin' money c'd buy,—a melodeon, an' agate-iron ware in the kitchin, an' runnin' water upstairs 'n' down; an' all the fam'ly that was dead was buried right near the house, with the han'somest tombstuns you ever see. An' then she got cold comin' from a sociable, an' took tuberc'lars, an' died; an' didn't it seem a shame to go an' leave all that?"

"It did indeed!" agreed Cicely. "We never know when we're well off, do we?"

"No'm; we're all poor sinners," said Hitty cheerfully.

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"My land alive, Mis' Ford, did you say the Professor was goin' to sleep in this yeller room? It's dusty's a miller, an' the bed ain't made."

"No, and neither is mine, under the mountain of clothes," said Cicely. "Make them, Hitty, please; and dust in there; but don't stop talking."

"I ain't no chambermaid," objected Hitty half-heartedly. "An' I've got to go down in a minute an' git that lunch started."

"Oh, bother the lunch!" said Cicely lightly. "There's lots of time. Make the beds first, Hitty,—you know yourself we can't sleep in unmade beds,—and stay where I can hear you talk. Did your cousin Mirandy have any children?"

"Yes, she did so," responded Hitty; and, touched in her weakest point, and unable to resist the temptation, she began without further protest to search for bed-clothes. "Yes, she hed four. Her oldest son,—Jabez his name was,—he raised pigs down Augusty way, an' he took an' married a crazy man's daughter. Her father he was crazy, an' his father *he* was crazy, an' way back to the great-gran'ther, *he* wa'n't all there. So they all s'posed Philomeny,—that was her name, Philomeny Crockett,—'ud go crazy on him too before she got done with it. Well, sure 'nough, things went along about so-so till they'd ben married two-three years, an' hed a couple o' children; an' then one day, while one o' the neighbour women was settin' in the kitchin with her, Philomeny she got up an' begun pilin' wood on the fire, an' she says, 'I'm a-goin' to chunk up the fire good an' hot,' she says, 'an' broil the baby for supper,' s' she.

Well, d'ye know that woman s'picioned quick's a wink that Philomeny wa'n't right, an' she run out an' hollered for help; an' in twenty minutes it took three men to hold her, an' she was pullin' hair out o' *them* in chunks. Jabez, he all'us said that a little more an' she'd 'a' set the house on fire, let alone the baby, if that woman hedn't 'a' ben so smart; an' he hedn't a mite of insurance neither. There, I *thought* I'd find some sheets in the bottom o' one o' these trunks."

"You have great intuitions," said Cicely, "and so had the neighbour woman. What happened to Philomeny?"

"Why, they took her to the 'sylum at Augusty," said Hitty, laying aside the sheets and beginning a hunt for blankets, "an' Jabez got his sister Maude to keep house for him, an' they got along fine for a spell; Maude she all'us was a better cook 'n Philomeny. Then Maude she got married to a Methodist minister (an' hed to jump some after that, *I tell ye*); and Philomeny got better, an' come home. Everybody was so anxious to encourage her they never s'much as said the word crazy to her; but twa'n't no use; in a month she took as crazy's a loon. Jabez was the one that s'picioned her that time; an' the way he come to do it was that she got a apurn-full o' rocks an' come for him, a-sayin' that she was David an' he was Goliath, an' she was a-goin' to sling-shot him to kingdom-come. Now where under the canopy are them blankets?"

"In a box, somewhere," said Cicely. "She wasn't very tactful, was she? Did she get him?"

"No'm, she was a poor shot," said Hitty deprecatingly. "Seems 's if —"

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"Hello there!" called a voice from below. "Where's everybody?"

"My sakes an' sorers!" ejaculated Hitty, "if there ain't the Professor!" She dropped her armful with a horrified gasp, and sped to the back stairs.

"Why, Roger!" cried Cicely, scrambling up and going into the hall, "what are you doing here at this time of day?"

"I know I'm late," said Roger. "I'm sorry, dearest, but there was so much to do that I couldn't get away. I won't keep your luncheon waiting a minute longer."

"Oh, you needn't worry about the luncheon!" said Cicely, laughing. "There isn't any, yet!"

Roger looked blank. "No luncheon?" he said. "Why, I thought I asked for it at one."

"So you did," assented Cicely, "but I took Hitty up to unpack, and she amused me so well I forgot the time. I never saw such a droll person; I think I'll change her function and retain her for general conversation."

"That's not very filling!" said Roger. Hunger, fatigue and hurry lent sharpness to his voice. "It may satisfy you, Cicely, but I need food."

"Well, just be patient for a minute," said Cicely. "I'll tell her to get luncheon right away."

"I can't wait," said Roger. "I have to be back at college at two."

"Well then," said Cicely, with the air of a person humouring an unreasonable child, "come up and help me dress, and we'll go to an hotel. Will that do?"

"No," said Roger, "I can't wait for that either. I'll

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have to start now, and get a bite on the way. I don't want to seem critical, dear, but we must have punctual meals."

"Really, Roger," said Cicely, impatiently indignant at the suggestion of reproach in his tone, "I'm astonished at you! I don't understand any one's making such a fuss over such a very small thing."

"It's not small," said Roger warmly; "it's work and health and everything important. I've got to eat if I'm going to be any good, and I've got to be punctual if I want to hold my job. You won't let it happen again, will you? Good-bye." He was gone as he spoke, without the usual kiss.

Cicely bit her red underlip as she looked after him. "Who would have believed that Roger had such a temper!" she exclaimed to herself. "What a way to talk! — and I haven't had any luncheon either, and I've worked all the morning harder than I ever did in my life. And such a house — and such a servant — Really, it's rather too much!" She tapped sharply on the stair-rail, indignant knuckles clenched. "Aunt Lucille was right," she said, aloud; "you don't know a man until you've married him."

§

"Mis' Ford!" screamed Hitty in piercing accents, from the foot of the stairs. "Here's a caller for ye!"

Cicely jumped up with alacrity from her tiresome labour with the trunks, and hurried to the mirror; but, though she was delighted with the tidings, she felt

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obliged to take exception to the manner of their delivery. "Then have the goodness, Hitty," she said severely, "to come up and tell me so."

"My land, Mis' Ford," said Hitty, ingenuously astonished, "I'm takin' them cakes out o' the oven!"

"If you were snatching brands from the burning," returned Cicely, patting her beautiful hair into order, "I should expect you to respect the customs of civilization."

"That's one thing," argued Hitty; "if a soul's lost a'ready, I don't s'pose it hurts it none to frizzle a little longer; but lemme tell ye, things that's goin' to be et are different. Ther's many a soul's salvation ben endangered by the hash comin' on to the table scorched."

Cicely, her reflection satisfying even her critical eyes, abandoned her attempt at domestic discipline, and ran laughing down the stairs. "Well, after you've insured our future welfare by rescuing the cakes," she said, "will you be the means of our present salvation by bringing in the tea-tray, as I told you?" And, all sunshine at this relief from work and depression, she flitted into the room where her visitor waited.

"You may have gathered that you were announced!" she said,—"but my domesticated savage didn't mention your name. I am Cicely Ford."

A tall, plain, noble-looking woman, with a kind face and unconsidered raiment, rose from the sofa, smiling.

"My dear Mrs. Ford," she said, "I am very happy to see you at last. I've heard so much of you that I feel like an old friend; I am Mrs. Davidson."

Cicely had measured her visitor with an appraising glance, condemned her clothes, approved her grey, wavy

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hair, and distrusted her manner of possessive friendship, before they finished shaking hands. "High-minded, but preachy," she said to herself. "What an *awful* hat! How could Roger say she was beautiful?"

"It's very good of you to come, Mrs. Davidson," she said politely, seating herself beside her new acquaintance. "Roger has spoken of you often."

"Not so often, I'm sure, as I have thought of him,—and of you," said Mrs. Davidson warmly. "I have so looked forward to your home-coming; to-day you have never been out of my mind. What did you say when you first saw your dear little house?"

The intimate friendly tone jarred upon Cicely, and she answered perversely. "Why, I don't remember what I *said*; but I *thought* it was a labourer's cottage,—it looked so neat and self-respecting, exactly as if there were cabbage cooking inside it!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Davidson, shocked and pained. "Oh, I hope you didn't tell Roger! He worked and planned and sacrificed so, his very heart was bound up in this house. I never saw a nature of such rapt devotion as his,—especially since he has had you."

Cicely flushed and stiffened. What right had this intrusive stranger to instruct her about her own husband? and what had any one but herself to do with her opinion of her house? A twinge of conscience lent edge to her resentment, and her distrust of Mrs. Davidson promptly crystallised into antagonism. She changed the subject brusquely.

"Has the social season of Cheltenham opened yet?" she asked abruptly.

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Mrs. Davidson, swallowing her earnestness with an effort, accepted the digression. "It opens officially on the fifth of October," she replied. "That's the President's Reception. After that the real Cheltenham life begins."

"Tell me about it," said Cicely. "I want to know what my duties will be, and how I can be useful to Roger."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that!" said Mrs. Davidson, her mobile face lighting again. "You can do him tremendous service; I suppose there's no life in which men's wives play a greater part than this. You know," she warmed to her subject, "we're all under-paid, and we all like to live nicely, and we're expected to travel, and to have expensive tastes; and to harmonize all that and come out even calls for a deal of managing on the wife's part. It's very hard to keep the home gracious and beautiful, and still pay the bills. And then of course there's Roger's work: informing yourself about what he's doing, and following his investigations from day to day—"

Cicely shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, it's no use talking to me about that!" she interrupted. "We've begun already to live like artisans; I defy anybody to reduce our expenses a penny a year. And if Roger had *interesting* work, like languages, or pictures,—but science smells so horribly! and I know he wouldn't want me to get my hands all green and blue. What I want to know about is the important part,—whom to cultivate, and whom not to bother with, and whom to give the *pas* to, and all that."

Mrs. Davidson looked a little dashed. "My dear Mrs. Ford," she said, "I'm sure you're on the wrong track. It isn't diplomacy we need in this life, it's just kindness. We're all quite simple people here, and all friends together. The pleasure of helping our husbands in their great work, the privilege of offering a bit of home atmosphere and a bit of stimulus to the boys as they keep passing through,—those are the things that make us fortunate women! and they have nothing to do with policy."

Cicely sat up very straight. "My aunt, who knows a great deal of the world," she said decisively, "told me that the first thing one should do in a new place was to find out the people who were worth considering, and then consider them. I shall certainly respect her advice.— This woman is a preaching idiot!" she added angrily to herself; and going to the door, she called, in a low voice of controlled irritation, "Hitty! where is tea?"

"Comin'!" returned Hitty, appearing in the hall with the tray. "I ain't a nigger jinny out o' the 'Rabian Nights, Mis' Ford, to come hoppin' through the floor in a smudge o' smoke with a table ready sot. Takes time to git a full-sized meal, 'specially when ther's another marchin' along behind it like Onward Christian Soldiers."

"You may set it here," said Cicely impatiently. "Have you brought cream? Very well, this is all we need now."

"That's lucky," remarked Hitty grimly. "Gittin' a lot at afternoon tea means hevin' to holler for more at

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dinner." She set the tray on the little table with a clatter, and stalked out.

"You seem to be ministered to by an original," observed Mrs. Davidson, profiting by the diversion to regain her patience and begin again.

"She's the most extraordinary creature, without exception, that ever drew breath," affirmed Cicely, pouring the tea. "As a conversationalist she's worth her weight in gold; but she must have gotten her household training in the Fiji Islands. What *slabs* of sandwiches! And she hasn't made rolls, either, as I told her to."

"Perhaps she hasn't found time," suggested Mrs. Davidson. "There's a great deal to do, even in a little house, for one pair of hands."

"But she doesn't have one single thing beside the housework!" said Cicely. "Roger brushes my clothes, and I do my hair myself. She's hardly even helped with the unpacking. No, she's just plain incompetent."

Mrs. Davidson sighed. She had very strongly the admonitory instinct that Cicely had detected, and much excellent advice burned on the tip of her tongue, but, though she heartily desired to smooth the way for this beautiful spoiled child, she perceived that it would be wasted. After a moment's silence, she tried another line.

"Mrs. Ford," she said,—wooing her hostess, as a generous plain woman will sometimes woo a beautiful exacting one,—"since you're interested in officials and dignitaries, I'll tell you a secret. Do you know that you and your young husband are likely to have experience in that direction before long?"

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"Why, no!" said Cicely, brightening. "Roger's only an assistant professor, isn't he?"

"Yes, but a most unusually gifted assistant professor," said Mrs. Davidson; "and when we go abroad next semester, his chief (that's my husband, you know), is going to put him in charge of the department."

"Oh, how nice!" exclaimed Cicely. "I'm so glad you told me!"

"Why, so am I, then!" said the older woman, pleased in Cicely's pleasure. "And I'll tell you something more, — though I know I'm rather premature,—" she added, impulsively confidential, "if my husband retires next June, as he thinks of doing, the appointment may — perhaps — prove to be permanent."

Cicely clapped her hands. "Splendid!" she cried. "'Head of the Department of Science of Cheltenham University!' Will it be on his stationery?"

Mrs. Davidson laughed. "That's going rather fast!" she said. "My husband's retirement is by no means settled; and even when it is, Roger won't be installed without a good deal of opposition. There are older men in the department, and men of wider reputation, who will think they have a prior claim."

Cicely knitted her brows, looking vigilant and eager. "Who are they?" she demanded.

"Well, let me see," reflected Mrs. Davidson. "Of course most of ours are big-minded men, who admire Roger and would be glad to see him succeed; but Dr. Reynolds and Dr. Kaltenborn,— yes, and Dr. Simms,— would certainly oppose him strongly."

"Reynolds — Kaltenborn — Simms," repeated Cicely,

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memorizing carefully. "Those are the ones for me to look after, then. I'll manage them! I wasn't bred a diplomat for nothing."

"Oh, Mrs. Ford," exclaimed Mrs. Davidson in dismay, laying her hand on Cicely's, "I hope you'll do nothing of the kind! Truly, it all depends on Roger himself. I did wrong to mention names; if his big experiments turn out well, and if he gets the laboratory he is hoping for, nothing can hinder him. I'm a good feminist, and the last one to underestimate the wife's part, but it doesn't consist in interfering. The best help you can give him is to encourage him in his work, and keep him free from worry at home."

"My dear Mrs. Davidson!" said Cicely coldly, withdrawing her hand, "I really think I shall have to judge for myself about my husband's affairs. If I can help him, I must do it along the lines that seem best to me."

Mrs. Davidson, hurt by the rebuff, rose. "Then I can only hope," she said slowly, "that your plans will not miscarry. Good-bye; I am very glad to have found you."

"Thank you," said Cicely, without warmth. She shook hands with her visitor, accompanied her punctiliously to the drawing-room door, and watched her departure with a frown. "Tiresome thing!" she said to herself. "If she thinks she's going to manage *me*, she's mistaken. I *will* make Roger's career, and I'll make it my own way: I'll show her."

§

The back door of the hall banged, and Roger, home

from college by a short-cut, entered hurrying. Cicely was still in the doorway of the little drawing-room, and their eyes met eagerly and shamefully. Roger spoke first, holding out his arms.

"I'm sorry I was cross this noon," he said. "I haven't had a minute's peace since. Will you forgive me, darling?"

Cicely had meant to preserve her displeasure considerably longer; but her lonely afternoon, the distraction of her new ambition, and most of all the potent power of his dear unhappy face and hungry arms, conquered her resentment. She went to him, and slipped her hands into his.

"Yes, I'll forgive you," she said. "But I hope you're really sorry; for you were *very* bad, you know."

"I was a brute," said Roger, folding her tightly, "and you are an angel. I'll never do so again."

"Then that's settled," said Cicely, kissing him lightly in the cleft of his chin, and slipping away; her caresses were always fleeting. "We have a horrible, savage tea in here; come and get some."

"Can't stop now," said Roger. "I've got to mow the lawn. Jove, it seems good to be at work again! I wasn't cut out for a loafer."

"No, you were made to dig and delve like a sober old grunting Badger," said Cicely, restored to cheerfulness. "I'll come with you, and garden: won't that be fun! We'll be like the court of Marie Antoinette, playing at shepherds and shepherdesses."

"There won't be much play about my mowing, I can tell you," said Roger, taking off his coat. "That grass

hasn't been cut for a month. And just what is your notion of gardening?"

"Oh, digging, and pruning, and watering, and cultivating," said Cicely, running ahead of him into the little enclosure behind the house. "See the brave red roses,—so late, and so lonely! I'll begin with them.—Oo!" as a thorn caught her delicate chiffon frock and tore a jagged rent.

"I thought so," said Roger, surveying her with adoring amusement. "You look about as fit for gardening as the *Venus de Milo*." He disappeared into the house, and emerged with an armful of miscellaneous trappings,—a huge gingham apron of Hitty's, overshoes, gloves, and an old cap of his own. "On with 'em!" he said. "This is the new uniform of the Cheltenham Street-Cleaners' League."

Cicely, laughing gleefully, decked herself in the ill-assorted garments, and pirouetted before him, light as a leaf in spite of the flapping overshoes. "Subject for Raphael!" she said, wrinkling her nose at him impishly. "St. Cecilia Ministering to the Majestic Forces of Nature!"

"St. Cecilia wouldn't own you for a forty-second cousin," said Roger, enchanted. "When you look like that,—you little witch,—you ought to be called—" he paused, then, in a flight of fancy unusual with him, finished, "Pixie!"

"Just listen to the Badger!" cried Cicely. "Just hear the grave old grunter turning poet! Roger—the staid old Codger—the grunting old Bodger—calls me Pixie—the tricksy—the friksy!" She danced up to

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him, snapping her fingers in his face, and danced away again.

“ You adorable imp! ” exclaimed Roger, catching her in his arms in the shelter of the lilac-bushes. “ You sweet monkey! — Sweet, sweet, sweet! ” he murmured over her fresh lips. “ What makes you so sweet? Why did such a sweet imp marry a stupid stick-in-the-mud like me? ”

“ To pull you out, of course! ” said Cicely; and her mind reverted at once to her clash with Mrs. Davidson. “ Roger! Am I a help to you, or am I not? ”

“ Why, of course, ” said Roger promptly, “ you’re the greatest help in the world. Kiss me. ”

“ Certainly I am! ” said Cicely. “ And I’ll be a greater one; you’ll see. Why didn’t you tell me you were going to be head of your department? ”

“ Because I’m not, ” said Roger. “ A good many miles of water will run under the bridges before anything like that happens. If dear old Davy resigns (which heaven forfend), they’ll choose a man who amounts to something. I say, kiss me. ”

“ They’ll choose you, ” said Cicely with determination, “ or I’ll know the reason why. ”

Roger laughed. “ Unfortunately, you aren’t the one to do the choosing! I’m very much obliged for your good wishes, sweet, but I’m afraid you haven’t anything to do with it. ”

Cicely drew away from him in displeasure. “ I don’t know who has, if I haven’t, ” she said coldly. “ Aren’t there rivals to be gotten out of the way? Isn’t there a laboratory to be obtained? ”

"Now look here!" said Roger, growing serious. "Don't you get any political bee in your little bonnet. If I'm to make good professionally, I've got to do it on my own merits: if I'm a better man than the other possibilities, I'll get the job, and if I'm not I won't. And as for the laboratory, the less said about that the better. It depends on the whim of a fat *nouvelle riche* whose husband has made a fortune in cough-drops, and who wants to get into society by giving a million to education; she knows the merits of the case, and how much we need the laboratory,— and I hope to heaven she'll give it to us! but there's nothing to be done. I won't win it by truckling. So you keep your fingers out of the pie, girlie."

Cicely moved away, and, kneeling by the rose-bushes, began to break off twigs in offended silence. "He talks exactly like that woman!" she said to herself indignantly.

Roger too moved away, and, going to the little shed at the back of the yard, dragged forth the clanking lawnmower. Half-way across the grass he stopped to ask a question.

"Who told you about this head-of-the-department notion?" he queried.

"Mrs. Davidson," answered Cicely, without turning her head.

"Oh, has she been here?" exclaimed Roger eagerly. "Isn't she a jewel?"

"I don't know her well enough to say," replied Cicely coldly.

"She's one in a million," averred Roger. "And I'll

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tell you what, dear, she's the person to advise you about your responsibilities. What she doesn't know about Cheltenham life isn't worth knowing. And I'm very sure she would tell you not to 'play politics.'"

Cicely made no answer. A prick of jealousy at this evident accord mingled with her resentment against Mrs. Davidson, and her morning mood of dissatisfaction and displeasure returned upon her. Roger, aware that something was wrong, looked at her anxiously; and through his anxiety also returned the morning's depression and disappointment.

"Come with me, dear," he said, fighting against the growing feeling of estrangement. "I've got to get to work."

"I'm working here, thank you," answered Cicely, busily continuing her futile labour.

"But I'm going to mow the front lawn, and I don't want to be all alone," coaxed Roger. "Come with me."

"Why should I?" asked Cicely, without moving.

"Why, so we can be together," said Roger. "Husbands and wives work together, don't they?"

Cicely rose slowly, and joined him. "I want to work with you, Roger," she said, "if you'll only be reasonable."

"I want to be reasonable, Cicely," answered Roger earnestly. "I want to make you happy, and give you everything in my power. I only feel that in professional matters I have to stand or fall on my own feet, not yours."

Cicely stiffened her slender neck, and held her chin a

little higher. "Aunt Lucille said," she remarked, "that the first qualification for a wife was to be a good strategist. And she certainly knows."

"I suppose she does, about her own line," said Roger patiently. "But college life isn't diplomacy; and I tell you, sweetheart, I don't want to succeed by intriguing."

Cicely's cheeks flushed with mounting anger. "Very well," she said. "You and Mrs. Davidson seem to be agreed. Have your own way." She seized the rake he had leaned against the house, and, as he began in depressed silence to drive the lawn-mower across the little front lawn, she followed, raking violently. "If Roger had a grain of sense, or if that woman hadn't poisoned his mind," she thought, "we might really work together like this; he'd be the steady draught-horse, plodding along in front, and I'd come after and put in the fine touches. But he's blind; and I don't care." She scattered the grass right and left with reckless strokes.

"Some one's coming to see you, Cicely!" said Roger suddenly, stopping his work to indicate a large limousine that was turning into the little street. "I suppose you'll want to disappear and take off those street-cleaner duds."

Perversity came at once to the front in Cicely's mood. "I don't see why I should," she said. "If I have no social responsibility about your career, there's no need for me to care what sort of appearance I make. I shall do very well as I am."

Roger's eyes showed the hurt that her tone gave him, but he made no comment. "Well, I don't believe I'm fit for publication," he said. "I'll withdraw and get a

coat on while there's time." He disappeared around the corner of the house.

Cicely stood her ground. She had never in her life made for one minute the disreputable appearance which she now chose to display publicly; but she did not care how she looked, or what sort of credit she reflected on Roger. She watched the movements of the approaching car with eyes recklessly alight. "If I'm of no use, I'll have a little fun!" she thought. "I'll make myself felt *somehow* in this extraordinary society!"

The limousine came rapidly down the street, passed the little red house, and stopped at a yellow house farther down on the other side. A stout, ornate dame alighted, dismissed the car with a wave of a fat hand, climbed laboriously up the porch steps, and rang the bell. Cicely, losing interest, was about to turn away; but when the door was opened and the visitor had propounded a question, it seemed that she had come to the wrong goal; she turned and stumped laboriously down again, and, as her chariot had gone to the end of the street to turn around, she was forced to rectify her mistake on foot. With a very bad grace she started diagonally across towards the little House of Ford. The facts that the road was muddy and that her French-heeled shoes obviously pinched did not tend to increase her satisfaction; and by the time she reached the sidewalk she was very much out of breath and out of temper.

Cicely watched with dancing eyes; she was in a mood for malicious amusement. "Good-afternoon!" she called out sweetly.

The visitor surveyed the daintily disreputable figure with a glance in which superiority and irritation contended for mastery. "Does Mrs.—Roger—Ford—reside here?" she puffed haughtily.

"I believe she does," said Cicely.

"Then go tell her," commanded the stout lady, "that I want—to see her. Tell her—" she paused impressively, and took a breath worthy of the announcement, "Mrs. Martin de Mullen is here!"

Cicely hesitated an instant, reflecting; she could not decide whether it would be more amusing to declare herself, or to continue on the present footing. But the delay was too much for the visitor's strained temper, and she forced the issue.

"Come, hurry up!" she said angrily, the careful finish disappearing from her voice. "I'm not used to bein' kept waitin'!"

This decided Cicely; her eyes danced again. "Then don't wait any longer," she suggested with a charming smile.

"Well, of all the impudence!" ejaculated the stout lady, glaring. "I'll tell your mistress on you!"

"Oh, are you going in anyway?" said Cicely. "I wish you luck. But I'm afraid we don't want any." She glanced deprecatingly at the large gold bag in her visitor's fat hand.

"You—you outrageous—you—you—!" gasped the lady; and, inarticulate with rage, she flounced to the curbstone and waved furiously at her approaching chariot.

"I thought you were going in!" said Cicely, sweetly

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surprised. “ ‘ None but the brave can pay their fare,’ you know. Well, if you can’t stop, *good-bye!* I hope it won’t spoil.” She waved her clumsy glove in a mocking farewell as the lady clambered pantingly aboard.

“ Cicely! ” said Roger, returning at this juncture. “ What have you been doing? ”

“ Bearding a raging lion! ” said Cicely, sparkling with glee. “ I routed her, too! ”

“ I see you did, ” said Roger. He hesitated; he had heard enough to be sorely distressed that a visitor to his home should be so received, yet he did not want to scold. “ Do — do you think you were exactly kind? ” he asked slowly.

“ Oh, as for that, she treated me like the beasts that perish! ” said Cicely. “ And if I’m not of any importance, it doesn’t matter how I behave. You say I can’t make you head of the department anyway.”

“ Not at this rate, ” said Roger, with a touch of bitterness. “ That was the giver of the possible laboratory,— the person you were going to wind around your finger.”

Cicely was startled, but her mood of reckless indifference sustained her, and she only flushed a little more brightly. “ Well, you don’t believe in truckling! ” she taunted.

Roger flushed too. “ No, but I believe in common courtesy, ” he said.

At this Cicely’s eyes blazed. “ If you had had the ‘ common courtesy, ’ ” she retorted, “ to put a little confidence in your wife, you would be in a different situation at the present moment! ”

“ I put so much confidence in my wife, ” said Roger

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slowly, "that I trusted her to be considerate and kind whether there was anything to be gained by it or not. I seem to have been mistaken."

An electric, pricking glow, half pleasurable, half appalling, ran along Cicely's spine. She flashed an answer white-hot from the thrill of it. "You certainly were, if you thought I would be a door-mat for people you don't consider me fit to manage! You may imagine that you and your women aides can use me to wipe your feet on, but I have other ideas!"

"Oh—! *Cicely*—!" exclaimed Roger, utterly aghast. He put out his hand to catch her; but she had marched, carnation-cheeked, past him and into the house.

Inside the locked door of her room, she dropped on a chair in the midst of the gay confusion, and stared unseeingly before her, with hands clenched. "It's an outrage!" she cried to herself. "Roger will let that Davidson woman and that horrible fat bourgeoisie do anything they please to him, and he won't listen to a word from me! They insult me, and he is delighted! He doesn't mind how people treat me, so long as they please *him*.—Oh well, who cares!" She flung out her hands in a reckless gesture. "I don't! I wish I had some one to dance with. I won't sit here and mope—I won't—I won't—" The hands fell, and suddenly they were clasped over the delicate frock that hung on the back of the chair, and Cicely's head was upon them. "Oh, what a day, what a day!" she sobbed. "Why didn't any one tell me that marriage was like this?"

II

THE DIPLOMAT'S ENTERING WEDGE

ON the evening of the President's reception, the eligible world of Cheltenham gathered in force. It was the most important formal event of the year, when Greek met Greek in best bib and tucker, newcomers were appraised, old members of the sacred circle took each other's measure anew, and the fine impalpable bonds and barriers that make up social intercourse were strengthened. The scene held a certain extramundane splendour, devoid of glitter, yet serenely, academically brilliant. The great stately rooms, classically restrained in their decoration, the imposing presences of the President and Mrs. President, the combination of intellect with a chastened worldliness in the appearance of the guests, all combined to create an atmosphere not found in the entertainments of *Vanity Fair*,—the soothing and edifying aura of Learning in Evening Dress.

Cicely, aware that this was her formal introduction to Cheltenham society, and, since her peace-making with Roger, both conscience-stricken about her previous conduct and confirmed in her diplomatic intentions for the future, was sufficiently impressed to be very much on her good behaviour. She wore a gown of shimmering white and soft translucent green, in which she looked like a

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lily-of-the-valley, virginal and shining; and as she entered the drawing-room by her husband's side,—bright head high, eyes wide and eager,—the sudden silence was almost audible in its tribute. She heard it, and flushed a little with pleasure; and Roger heard it too with his duller masculine perceptions, and burned into sudden radiance with uncontrollable pride and joy. Their advance through the long room,—beautiful youth at its beautiful best,—was a triumphal progress: a buzz of excited talk closed in behind them.

“Mrs. Ford,” said the President, stepping forward from his place, and bending his august regard upon Cicely in a very human manner, “we thought ourselves well off when we had your husband here alone; what shall we think now, when he has brought us such wealth as this?”

A saucy retort anent the doubtful position of wealth in the scholarly world was on Cicely's tongue; but she had come with a firm resolve to be discreet and diplomatic, and would not grant it egress. Instead, demure gaze fixed on the stately Roman-nosed countenance above her, she answered with silent dimples; and in this she displayed more wit than if she had uttered the cleverest retort in history, for the President,—like many another great man,—had less appreciative ears for other people's eloquence than for his own.

“Well, if we live up to the obligation that your coming lays upon us,” said he, answering himself gallantly, “your life in Cheltenham will be a bed of roses. You will find us appreciative debtors, I promise you.”

“Mrs. Ford,” said the President's wife, with suave

effusiveness, "it gives me *very* great pleasure to open the doors of our little world to you. I hoped to explain some of its *mysteries* when I called; I was *extremely* sorry to miss you, as I really *desired* to help you get properly started."

Cicely's eyes narrowed slightly, appraising this semi-official patronage. Mrs. Staunton, it was easily seen, was by nature a little fussy woman, made for little fussy concerns, who had schooled herself to that conscious poise and graciousness often seen in the small wives of great men, and now acted her part with a satisfaction she could not conceal. Cicely had met her type before, and knew (with a mischievous longing), how easily she could reduce the official dignity to its native elements. But she held heroically to her resolve of discretion, and answered irreproachably.

"You are most kind," she murmured. "I was deeply distressed to lose your visit. Thank you *so* much for asking me to pour to-night; I feel more honoured than I can tell you."

Mrs. Staunton's intuition, quicker than her wit, perceived a slight flaw in the spirit of this reply. "I always ask the brides," she said, with a sharp lifting of her intricate blonde coiffure.

"Oh," said Cicely, hiding a twinkle, "how fortunate for me!"

"You are going to like us here in Cheltenham, I trust, Mrs. Ford?" inquired the President, turning hastily from his greeting of Roger.

Cicely raised to him those large respectful eyes, and smiled.

"Well, Ford, I think the university is as much to be congratulated as you!" remarked the great man, with unwonted geniality. "We are a highly favoured community."

"Not a doubt about that, sir!" beamed Roger, as he returned Mrs. Staunton's limp handshake with an exuberant grip. "Cheltenham's the luckiest institution in the country, and I'm its luckiest atom." His glance dwelt upon Cicely, as they moved away side by side, with a visible caress.

"A most delightful young lady!" pronounced the President, with emphasis. "As beautiful as she is witty; a rare combination."

"She's too sure of herself!" said his wife, vaguely dissatisfied. "And I'm *positive* her hair has been touched up; that colour simply *can't* be natural."

Mrs. Davidson came forward quickly, beautiful in the simple dignity of her low-cut black gown. "Good evening, Mrs. Ford!" she said, with the same sincere cordiality which she had brought to their last ill-fated interview. "Good evening, Roger. How delightful to see you together! Quantities of people want to meet the new-comer; may I present some of them? I'm supposed to be 'assisting,' so they've brought their pleas to me."

"I shall be charmed," replied Cicely sedately.

"Then I'll start with the department," said Mrs. Davidson, "as charity ought to begin at home. First of all — where is he? — oh, here — this is the head. I'll let him have you a minute, while I collect the others."

She moved away with a smiling nod, and her place at Cicely's side was taken by a portly, silver-haired man, with eyes framed in countless merry wrinkles. Geniality was his first note, keenness of intellect his second, and then, underlying both, a deep nobility that was the real fundamental of the chord, and that chimed with the same quality in his wife. Cicely warmed to him wholeheartedly, and upturned her face to his with an instant lovely smile.

"Let me!" said Roger quickly, "Cicely, this is Dr. Davidson, my best friend and greatest creditor. Doctor, didn't I tell you I had something of a wife to show you?"

"You did, my boy," said Dr. Davidson, clapping Roger heartily on the shoulder with one hand, while he clasped Cicely's slender fingers with the other, "and it's lucky I had a *little* preparation!" He laughed a big, jovial laugh, that deepened the wrinkles around his eyes, and gazed at Cicely appreciatively. "Well, Roger, your deserts are such big ones that even this isn't too much for you. As for you, my dear lady, I don't know you well enough to say what you deserve, but from your looks I think you are worthy of your husband; and I can't go higher in the complimentary line than that."

Cicely gave him a glowing look of pleasure: freed from the subtle hostility which had made her object to the same thing in his wife, she rejoiced in his evident love of Roger. "No, you show yourself a flatterer," she said. "I shall beware of you."

"Oh, come, doctor!" laughed Roger, embarrassed and happy. "I never thought *you'd* horse me like this!"

"And as for the rest of us," pursued the doctor cheer-

fully, "we're just eleemosynaries,— just a plain bread-line. We'll stand and wait for the crumbs. Look around you and see!" And indeed the crowding faces about the room were nearly all turned towards Cicely with open admiration, changing as she glanced at them into the consciously absent look of people who want to prove to the person they are staring at that they are staring at some one else.

Cicely, who was inured to being inspected in a fearless reserved manner, met the concentrated gaze without embarrassment. "Faculty parties look just like ordinary parties, don't they?" she said,—"almost."

"What's the difference?" asked Roger, drawing her out with ill-concealed pride.

Cicely hesitated; privately she thought this one rather shabby, but of course such an indiscreet opinion must be far from her tongue. "Well, there's a sort of *double-entente* in the atmosphere!" she said gaily. "The first time I saw scholars in the mass, at the opening exercises here, they wore the appropriate uniform; but now they look just like ordinary men, and it's confusing, because of course they're not."

"Ah, Mrs. Ford!" said Dr. Davidson, quizzically, "I see the effect of the diplomatic training!"

"Just watch me a while," said Cicely, turning to him, roguishly confidential, "and you'll see more evidence of it than that."

"Trust me!" said he, "I'll watch; and I'll be ready to dodge for shelter when the thunderbolts begin to fall!"

"Here we are!" announced Mrs. Davidson, reappear-

ing with a small army of recruits. "Mrs. Ford, I want you to meet your colleagues. Mrs. Simms—and Dr. Simms,—and Dr. Elton, and Dr.—and Mrs.—Reynolds,—" she spoke the names with careful emphasis, pausing to give space for the greetings, "and Mrs. Welsh—and Dr. Welsh,—and Mrs. Kaltenborn, whose husband is still abroad,—and Messrs. Grant, Holmes and Peters, the Three Graces."

Cicely responded punctiliously to each introduction, taking curious note of all her new associates, and especially of those with whom she was already preoccupied. Like most of the dwellers in this college world, they were strongly marked personalities, incapable of being docketed in pigeon-holes; purpose, not chance, had brought them together, and in varying degrees their faces showed it. In dress and bearing they displayed an odd diversity, some carefully conventional (consciously defying the world to put them in the class of shabby intellectuals), and some serenely indifferent to unbecoming garments and *passé* modes. But in their prompt and cordial welcome to the newcomer they were strikingly unanimous; for the academic circle, with its strong clan-spirit, is everywhere set apart from less united and less altruistic societies by the bounteousness of its hospitality to the saved souls who enter it.

However, the conversation,—once the welcome had been extended and accepted,—was very formal. Mrs. Davidson had departed on other errands, taking Roger with her; it rested with Cicely, the centre of interest, to pitch the key; and she, though pleased and a good deal surprised by her reception, was too full of inten-

tional diplomacy to allow herself to be natural. She watched the people around her closely, striving to discern motives and emotions; and being asked whether she liked Cheltenham, responded that she did, and inquired whether they liked Cheltenham, and learned that they liked it greatly; then, after a short pause (during which she meditated a plan of attack), the question of her approval of Paris was raised, and she responded in polite antiphony with a counter-query as to their approval of Paris, and it developed that all concerned esteemed Paris highly. It was irreproachable, but not thrilling. Dr. Davidson watched with an amused twinkle in his shrewd eyes, and the admiring bachelors began to hover uneasily. It was evident to every one that Cicely's discreet demeanour was but a flimsy disguise; the situation was in a state of suspense, waiting for somebody to give it a push and show its real intentions.

"This is your first experience of academic life, I believe, Mrs. Ford?" politely asked a small man at Cicely's elbow.

Cicely's alert eyes considered him for a second before she answered. He was Dr. Simms, one of the men whom Mrs. Davidson had named as Roger's opponents,—a sandy-haired, monochrome person, with a high voice, a high forehead, and an inconsiderable nose. One glance showed her that little art was needed to draw the fangs displayed by his inoffensive smile; the motive power of the opposition was clearly elsewhere.

"How clever of you to know that!" she answered, with a sweetly ingenuous manner. "Yes, it's my very first."

"Except your own college life, of course!" said Mrs. Simms sharply. She was a buxom woman, vigorous and capable; her glance was forcefully direct, and her speech of a decisive, catapult sort. Small hope of placating *her* with soft simplicities! She was the iron hand within the innocuous male glove.

"I never went to college," said Cicely,—discarding a little of the sweetness, but offering a disarming humility. "I'm sorry to say I'm uneducated."

"That need not follow!" said Mrs. Simms. "Some very intelligent women have had no education but what they have achieved by their own efforts." She looked at Cicely disapprovingly, the consciousness of her own M.A. bristling out of every fold of her hard gown. "But I must say they are rare," she added uncompromisingly.

Cicely's eyes caught those of a dark and pretty woman standing near her, and struck a spark from them; and in the instant needed for the amused interchange of glances, she told herself that she had found a friend. This was Mrs. Reynolds, the wife of the trenchant man with the Van Dyck beard,—a young, very modern woman, remarkably attractive in a trailing, lazy way, with a face of bored impassivity and satirical eyes. She had been studying Cicely's gown and hair in appreciative silence, and now she swept her glance from that perfect ensemble to Mrs. Simms' bulging figure and tight coiffure, and back to Cicely again.

"Of course," she drawled carelessly, "ignorance has its compensations. Said to be bliss, don't you know."

"Just as dirt is said by unclean people to be healthy!"

said Mrs. Simms. "I've no patience with that sort of nonsense!"

"Ven I vas a girl," said Mrs. Kaltenborn,— a comfortable Germanic lady of middle age, dressed with a comfortable Germanic disregard for fashion, "dey used to say ve got to eat a peck of dirt in our lifetimes. Yes, so dey said vere I came from."

"Oh," said Cicely, looking at her with quick interest, "then you're like me, half a foreigner! Did you always live in Germany until you came here?"

"Ach, no!" said Mrs. Kaltenborn complacently. "In Saint *Loo-ey*!"

"Mrs. Kaltenborn is a good American citizen, you see!" said the man with the Van Dyck beard, in a crisp, decisive voice. "She comes of the solid Teutonic stock that gives new vigour to our country. And her husband, though imported from Berlin, is an excellent American too,— a heart-and-soul American, a lesson to the rest of us." He put his hands behind his back, and studied Cicely with his keen eyes.

Cicely flashed his look back with interest. In appearance he was the most conventional of all the men; with his ultra-correct raiment and his faultless grooming he would have passed anywhere for a fastidious type of man-of-the-world. But beneath the polished exterior, very near the surface, was a restless, greedy ambition, always gnawing at the obstacles in its way, always ready to pounce. The brief gaze revealed each to the other,— to Cicely, her husband's most unsleeping enemy; to Reynolds, the real fighter in the opposite camp. Their eyes clashed like weapons; and in Cicely

a quick surge of instinctive hostility overbore her intended discretion.

"What is your standard of good citizenship?" she demanded impetuously. "Do you judge by 'ability to bear arms'? I am both born here and imported,—I'm a natural citizen and an adopted one; I ought to make a warrior worth fighting!" Her challenging eyes, sparkling with sudden excitement, urged him to throw aside the mask and open battle on the spot.

There was a startled movement in the little circle. The push had been given, and the delicately balanced situation was rolling briskly towards disaster. Mrs. Reynolds smiled at Cicely with a frank admiration touched with her peculiar satirical quality; Mrs. Welsh, a rather spiritlessly feminine woman, looked terrified; Mrs. Simms rustled severely. Cicely, suddenly aware of her rashness, stood silent, flushed and a little daunted; her eyes ran swiftly from face to face, and meeting the eyes of Dr. Davidson,—humorous and kind, yet with a look of anxious disapproval in them,—they fell, abashed. She heard Dr. Reynolds give a sharp prefatory cough as he opened his lips to reply, and all at once she saw the precipice she stood upon, and resolved to withdraw before it was too late.

"Why, I sound like a jingo!" she said, summoning all her charm in an infectious laugh. "What a goose I am—talking about battle, murder and sudden death in this age of Peace Palaces! I hope I haven't alarmed you. I must go now; I see some one I have to speak to. I'm *very* glad to have met you all,—please come and see me when you can." And turning forthwith, she

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hurried swiftly away, leaving three of her new acquaintances with mouths half-opened to reply.

She had not the slightest idea where she was going, but in a moment, as she was half-way across the room, her eyes lighted providentially upon Mrs. Martin de Mullen. That lady,—invited in a rare academic concession to Mammon,—sat enthroned in a high-backed Renaissance arm-chair excellently contrived to emphasize her plump plebeian quality: her brief pursuit of Culture having modified her first conception of an evening toilette, she was attired with chaste simplicity in a plain crimson velvet gown that made her look like a well-boiled lobster, with a single enormous diamond hanging like a millstone about her neck. Her round, marcelled head rested against the carved chair-back with conscious queenliness, and she smiled benignly and vacantly on this gathering of distinguished poverty.

Cicely approached her with a new access of diplomatic discretion. “I think this is Mrs. de Mullen?” she said respectfully.

“The same,” replied the lady regally.

“I have heard of you, and wished to meet you,” proffered Cicely, “and I didn’t have any one to present me, so I came to present myself.”

“Ah!” said Mrs. de Mullen indulgently, “and who may you be? Your face is familiar, but I don’t,—so to speak,—recall your name.”

“I’m quite a stranger,” said Cicely hastily. “I’m Mrs. Roger Ford.”

A change came over Mrs. de Mullen’s complacent face, and she looked sharply at her new acquaintance. “Mrs.

Roger Ford, eh?" she said, with a momentary relapse into naturalness. "Is that so!"

"I have reason to fear," said Cicely quickly, seizing the bull by the horns, "that an inmate of my household was very rude to you the other day. I hope I've been misinformed."

"No, Mrs. Ford, you have not," said Mrs. de Mullen, the queenliness reappearing in full force. "Who was that individual, if I may ask?"

"A young person who was working for us," said Cicely promptly. "An ignorant creature, as you probably observed."

"And how did *you* come to be aware of the contrype? " pursued Mrs. de Mullen majestically.

"My husband happened to be near by," explained Cicely, "and overheard.— She doesn't work for us any more," she added, with a veracious inspiration.

Mrs. de Mullen's haughty manner relaxed. "I am gratified to hear that," she said. "Her manners were shocking."

"They were indeed," agreed Cicely. "My husband was appalled at her."

"Well," conceded Mrs. de Mullen, "the burjoyce are apt to be vulgar. They don't know any better. There are not many of them in Cheltenham, fortunately."

"Have you lived here long?" inquired Cicely, seating herself with a respectful air.

"No; we are recent acquisitions," said the great lady affably. "We formerly resided in Cincinnati, where Mr. de Mullen was what the French call a hommedy-fairs. But between you and me, Mrs. Ford, there is no

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real culture there; we felt out of place in such onvi-
rongs."

"I hope you find Cheltenham more congenial," said Cicely.

"We do; so much so," replied Mrs. de Mullen, "that we are going to reside here permanently. We are building a residence now,—a commodious residence in the French style, the kind they call a *shottoe*."

"Indeed!" said Cicely. "I suppose that's to accord with your name. I noticed at once that you were of Gallic origin."

"Did you really!" beamed Mrs. de Mullen. "Yes, I'm convinced that de Mullen is a form of a well-known French name,—what I might call a *deckadong* form at present. Mr. de Mullen was inclined to pronounce it Mullins when we were married, but I corrected that; and when our *shottoe* gets done, I'm going to revive it completely. I intend to always have a little dash,—what the French call a *soup-song*,—of French atmosphere in our home."

"A very happy thought," murmured Cicely. "Your cousin Comte René de Gravécourt de Chèsny-Desmoulins will be delighted. Charming creature, your cousin, isn't he?"

Mrs. de Mullen looked sharply at her, but was reassured by that limpid, respectful gaze. "Well, I have so many cousins," she said, "I don't exactly call him to mind at the moment. But I have no doubt he's quite de-rigger."

At this moment Roger, who had been hunting for Cicely, spied her lithe green-and-white figure, and came

hurrying to her side. Cicely greeted him with a dancing smile.

"Don't interrupt, Roger!" she said. "Mrs. de Mullen and I are having such an interesting chat!"

"Howdy-do, Professor!" said Mrs. de Mullen graciously. "Your wife and I are extremely congenial affinities. She's a very bright young person."

"I'm sorry to spoil such a pleasant interview," said Roger, shaking hands, "but I have to carry her off. She's got to do something in the dining-room; Mrs. Davidson sent me to say so."

"Oh, yes; I have to pour, because I'm a bride," said Cicely, rising. "I suppose brides are expected to be in a mood to make libations. I can't tell you how I have enjoyed this conversation, Mrs. de Mullen."

"Don't mention it, Mrs. Ford, don't mention it!" returned Mrs. de Mullen, now all smiles. "Always glad to indulge in a pleasant vis-à-vis. Good night, Professor. I am coming to call on your wife just as soon as my social duties will permit. Bon swore!"

"You wonderful little witch!" exclaimed Roger, in an undertone, as they crossed the room. "How did you do it? You've got her ready to eat out of your hand!"

"Now *that's* diplomacy!" said Cicely triumphantly. "You'd stalk along on one side of the road in your stuffy, high-minded way, and let her waddle along the other, until you both dropped, without so much as passing the time of day; and then you'd wonder why you didn't get your laboratory. *I'm* not above crossing the road and inquiring after the health of the cough-drops; and that's where I score. It's all in being open-minded."

"Perhaps!" said Roger dubiously.

"Certainly!" said Cicely with conviction. "Is this the dining-room? Oh yes, and here's the slave-driver. *Au voir, Roger.*"

A pretty, nervous, slightly faded woman, with social activity written large upon her animated face and modish gown, came hurrying to Cicely's side.

"This must be Mrs. Ford," she said rapidly. "I'm Mrs. Elton; I have charge of the dining-room; it's your turn to pour; you're to take the coffee. Over here; this chair. Ask the waiters for whatever you want. I'll introduce as many people as I can." She hurried away, worried, strained, and wholly in her element.

Cicely looked about her interestedly. The dining-room of the President's House was a lofty, dark, beautiful apartment, with a few fine pictures and an atmosphere of mellowed stateliness. At the other end of the long table, behind the piled flowers, sat a flushed girl in a very obvious wedding-gown, pouring chocolate; at smaller tables about the room other brides, of varying degrees of attractiveness, dispensed ices and cool beverages. Negro waiters wriggled in and out among the crowded guests, and the air was full of flower-fragrance and the rattle of animated conversation.

Presently, in a distant corner of the room, Cicely spied a knot of college boys, packed together in a tight defensive wedge and eating busily. She remembered having heard that the honour men of the senior class,—prize winners, presidents of societies, captains of teams,—were invited to this august function, and divined that a fellow-feeling of shyness, strengthened by their minority

in so large an assembly of elders, had drawn them into a lonely coalition. Her well-developed social instinct remonstrated: and, while she busied her fingers with the cups and the sugar-tongs, and her tongue with polite responses to the many civilities pressed upon her, she kept planning measures for withdrawing them from their isolation.

"Mrs. Elton!" she said, as that worried lady hastened by, "can't something be done for those boys over there? They look dreadfully out of it."

"Oh, my *dear*," expostulated Mrs. Elton, "don't talk to me about *boys*! Why, there are three *trustees* here that I haven't got around to introducing yet! And by the way, they're all dying to meet you; everybody's talking about you; I'm going to bring them up as soon as I can; try to keep a clear space for them. You're going to be the success of the season." She was gone again before she finished speaking.

"Well, if she won't do it," said Cicely to herself, "I must find somebody who will. I can't have those poor dears languishing alone like that." Seeing all their eyes fastened upon her with open enthusiasm, she sent them a friendly smile, and the irradiation of their faces in eager response gave her an inspiration. "Why, I'll go myself!" she thought. "Of course, I'm a married woman now; I can do as I please." Her face brightened with pleasure; she slipped from her chair, and went quickly to where they stood.

"Good evening!" she said. "Won't you come and let me give you some coffee?"

"Will we? — Won't we? — I should think we

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would!" Their answers tumbled back eagerly, and with prompt unanimity they all trooped after her to the table, and clustered round her chair.

"Now, this is better!" said Cicely blithely. "Cream? Sugar? Two lumps?" She looked them over from the tail of her eye while she served them, noting the good breeding and good clothes of them all, and the grace and distinction of some. "Now why can't Roger talk to me about nice boys like these," she thought, "instead of those janitors and scrubs he's always raving about? He does have the most extraordinary taste!"

"Better? Well, rather!" said the boy who had first answered her,—a handsome youngster, dark-eyed, dark-haired and debonair. "We were stuck there like a lot of turtles in a mud-bank. We're a thousand times obliged to you for getting us out."

"What made you stick in the first place?" asked Cicely. "You're all able-bodied!"

"Yes, but you know there's nobody here except profs and that sort," said the boy confidentially. "There wasn't any one we wanted to talk to — until you came."

Cicely smiled at this ingenuous tribute; secure in the dignity of her matronhood, she could look with an indulgent eye on bold, charming boys. "That's flattering to all the intellectual monarchs!" she said. "You'd better not let them hear you!"

"I don't care about them!" said the boy cheerfully. "I'm talking to *you*. Haven't you just come to this place?"

"I came last month," said Cicely, amused at his frank curiosity. "Two weeks and four days ago, to be exact."

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"I thought so!" said the boy. "I've been here three years, and I know you couldn't have stayed around long without my finding out about it."

"Why, are you the official censor of the population?" inquired Cicely, laughing at him.

"I don't know beans about the population," he answered seriously, "but if you'd been here I'd have known it."

"Here, you Spivy!" interrupted a tall boy, elbowing the speaker indignantly. "Ring off, and give somebody else a chance!"

"You run away and play with yourself, Chug," said the dark boy firmly. "This is my turn. I can do without you."

"Maybe you can," retorted the other, "and maybe it's the other way round. Come, get in motion; step lively!"

"You'll both have to move pretty quickly," interposed Cicely, much amused; "in fact, everybody who's got coffee will have to stand aside this very minute; here comes Mrs. Elton with both hands full of hungry trustees and deans."

At the dread name of dean, the boys all looked uneasy, and became extraordinarily circumspect; and taking their cups of coffee with polite murmurs, they receded rapidly into their corner. Cicely watched them as they ensconced themselves, and again from time to time between her ministrations to the thirsty dignitaries; and always she found their admiring eyes upon her, and always flashed a bright smile of friendship back at them.

At last Mrs. Elton came hurrying to relieve her of duty. "Your time's up," she said; "and I really think

everybody's been fed; and anyway Mrs. Davidson sent word that we mustn't keep you here another minute; so go. Everybody's *raving* about you! The rooms look lovely, don't they? If it had been *my* reception, the cream wouldn't have held out. I do hope you've had something to eat yourself. Good night; thank you so much; I'm coming to see you *very* soon; good-bye!"

At the dining-room door Roger claimed her; and there, seeing her surrounded by intellectual lights, the boys nodded her a shy good night. They had eaten all they could, and, having no more hope of conversation with her, were going home. The dark-haired boy, with his engaging assurance, called out, "Good-bye! I'm going to see you again, somehow, soon!" but the others remained admiringly mute to the last.

"Let's say good night, dear," said Roger. "It's late, and I don't want you to get too tired."

"Oh, it's just the 'shank of the evening,'" protested Cicely, "and I'm fresh as a daisy! I don't want to go yet."

"I think you ought," said Roger, looking at her solicitously. "You're more used up than you think; you'll feel it in the morning. And—and I have to make a very early start to-morrow."

"But I don't *want* to go!" said Cicely. "I'm having such a good time, and I feel so frisky! We really can't go yet."

"I'm afraid we must," said Roger. It cost him an effort to be firm, but the fact that he was thinking of Cicely (who never knew when she was tired), and not

of himself, gave him determination. "Come, let's begin," he added, turning towards the drawing-room.

Cicely, too well trained to quarrel in public, turned to accompany him without further remonstrance; but rebellion began to flash up within her. "Roger is selfish!" she thought. "Just because he has to get up early in the morning, he doesn't want me to enjoy myself at all! Well, I'll have some fun first. I won't go without one little fling."

In the long drawing-room the host and hostess still stood faithful to their post, wearily smiling. Cicely led the way to them, her face demure, her hand held out. "My husband says we have to say good night," she said sweetly.

"What, Mrs. Ford! So soon?" said the President, reviving into animation. "Have you no charity?"

Cicely, summoning the conversational powers which pleased him best, smiled silently.

"Well, well," he answered himself, with Jove-like geniality, "we must not be grasping. We must take the good the gods provide us, and be thankful. I have enjoyed this meeting to the full, Mrs. Ford. May I look forward to another delightful chat in the near future? Ah, thank you; I am indeed fortunate!"

"Oh, *must* you go?" inquired Mrs. Staunton, with her most impressive patronage. "Too bad! Thank you *so* much for helping me. I will tell you a secret, my dear; a little bird told me that your first appearance in Cheltenham was a *distinct* success!"

The mischief and recklessness effervescing in Cicely

seethed up beyond restraint. She stole a glance at Roger; he was safely occupied with the President. "Oh, *don't* mention it!" she said. "Delighted, I'm sure! And since you are so *kind*, I must tell you that *another* little bird said something *almost* as nice to me about your reception. Come, Roger, we *must* go. We really *can't* dawdle here any longer. *Good night!*"

"Mrs. Staunton looked a little odd when I said good-bye to her," remarked honest Roger, as they left the room. "Perhaps her feet pain her from standing so long."

"More likely her self-satisfaction has gone to her head," rejoined Cicely. "Good night, Dr. Davidson,—don't forget about those thunderbolts! Good night, Dr. Reynolds,—I hope we can go on soon from where we left off!" And now, the spirit of reckless mischief having taken full possession of her, she ran to where Mrs. Simms stood, cloaked and determined, in the hall, and fixed her with a glance brilliant with naughtiness. "If you'll come soon to see me, Mrs. Simms," she said, "there's still hope for me. I'm not too old yet to learn!"

"Here's your cloak, dear," coaxed Roger, turning from the door where he had secured it. "Come and put it on; the cab's waiting."

"In a minute!" said Cicely. "I must pay my respects first to the aristocracy." For in a corner near the outer door, planted on a small and trembling ottoman, Mrs. de Mullen sat and waited for her triumphal car; and Cicely, darting towards her, swept her a deep court courtesy. "Adieu, Madame Martin-Desmoulins!"

she said. "Commend me kindly to your kinsfolk of the nobility, and let me help you when you compose your coat-of-arms. Lozenges are *much* used!"

"How well you know them all, sweetheart!" said Roger fondly, as he wrapped her in her velvet cloak. "And how well they all know you!"

"They're beginning to," remarked Cicely, with a tardy misgiving. "Get me into that cab, quick, Roger. I think it *is* time for me to go."

III

THE NEW PUPIL

CICELY was now fully launched upon the delightful community life of a college town. Since the reception, and the stream of visits that followed it, she was a duly incorporated member of that charmed circle where brains and breeding are the only social coin, and money is viewed solely as a prosaic necessity,—like underwear, to be made use of in its proper place, and not to be mentioned in public. Promptly voted a valuable acquisition, she was welcomed on all sides with even more than the usual warmth of this warm-hearted body; her progress from circle to inner circle, until she reached the inmost centre of exclusiveness, was comet-like in its brevity; and her peers in age and position, the instructors' and assistant professors' wives, observed her with envy not untinged by awe.

Cicely herself, however, was far from appreciating her good fortune. She had been fed all her life on cake, and now had no perception of the superfine quality of this wholesome bread and butter. In the glittering world where she had fluttered away the first part of her brief career, money was equally non-existent, being so omnipresent as to be taken for granted,—and it is an undoubted fact that it is pleasanter to ignore money be-

cause of a surfeit than because of a dearth:—while as for breeding and brains, of the former there had always been an embarrassment, and with the latter she had never concerned herself one way or the other. This strange spectacle of brave women employing abilities that might have directed great establishments in such humdrum cares as keeping the children clothed and the board spread, and in the greater task of achieving frugality without sordidness, filled her only with impatient pity; and the many men who had sacrificed opportunities of brilliant commercial prosperity for ideals and poverty impressed her not at all. Her good breeding made her accept all the tributes of hospitality that were offered her sweetly and appreciatively enough, but without the slightest conception of the thought, labour and sacrifice that they stood for: and the day after many a faculty function, when the hostess was trying not to sigh as she thought, “That means another week off our summer outing!” Cicely herself was reflecting, “It was nice of them to do it, but I don’t see much fun in shabby parties!”

Yet Cicely was by no means bored in her new environment. The very youth and inexperience which blinded her to its finer aspects sharpened her appetite for all that was unwonted in it, and made her approach it with zest. She turned to each new phase of her complex surroundings with the eager amusement of a child at a new game: only this life as she saw it was a very different matter from the stately and beautiful life to which Roger had believed he was bringing her.

“Cheltenham is a great deal more interesting than I

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thought it would be, Badger," she told him cheerfully. "Do you know what I like about it?"

"I can guess," said Roger, looking gratified and happy. "It's the fine, inspiring atmosphere, and the big opportunity to be useful to your fellow-men."

"Oh, no, that isn't it," said Cicely. "It's the freaks. I never had any idea there could be so many in one place; it's a real revelation."

"The freaks!" repeated Roger. "But don't you like the nice people,—the brilliant ones, the lovely ones? Don't you feel your life enlarged since you came?"

"Can't say I've noticed myself 'swellin' wisibly!'" replied Cicely. "No, I like the de Mullens, and the Simmses, and that cock-eyed man that hunts caterpillars, and the bald-headed one that has aphasia. If I didn't know a soul but those,—and you, of course,—I should never have a dull moment."

"I'm glad to know what category I belong in," said Roger, with a crestfallen smile. "I might take a clown course in a dramatic correspondence school, and then perhaps I could entertain you when your other friends weren't around."

"You'd better practise to outdo them in funniness while they're here," said Cicely gaily, "for when they're not around, you're not either."

It was true that the two saw little of each other in these days. Now that work was in full swing, Roger left directly after breakfast, had classes until noon, and departed after luncheon to spend the afternoon in the laboratory. By the time he returned there was usually a small throng about the tea-table, which lingered until

almost dinner-dressing-time; and in the evening there were always engagements. The days of long walks and long talks and long dreaming under the trees were gone, and the thousand intricate interests of every-day usurped their place. Roger, absorbed heart and soul in his work though he was, missed the earlier communion passionately; and Cicely, while she slipped easily into a busy round of pursuits much like those she had left behind in her girlhood, was often lonely and vaguely dissatisfied.

As she had foreseen,—or willed,—Mrs. Reynolds was the first of all her new acquaintances to become a real part of her life. Little woman-of-the-world as Cicely was, she was yet at heart an inexperienced child; her naughtinesses were only the effect of mischievous high spirits and life-long spoiling; and she found in Mrs. Reynolds' flippant cynicism an indication of enviable superiority. The two fell soon into close intimacy; and Cicely's bright spirit humbly sat at her friend's feet, to learn of her.

"I ought not to have dragged you over here to-day, Clarissa," said Cicely one afternoon, as they settled themselves before a crackling fire, with the tea-table cosily between them. "I know you have any quantity of things to do; and as for me, I owe ten thousand calls, at the most conservative estimate."

"I'd always rather be amused than do things, my love," said Mrs. Reynolds, in her lazy voice; "and you've no idea how glad I was to get away to-day,—it's my day for writing to my mother-in-law. These are the best sandwiches I ever ate. I'll tell you what to do about your calls,—wait till woman's-club day, when

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they're all out, and you can kill ten in an afternoon."

"That's a splendid scheme!" exclaimed Cicely. "Only I can never wait until Friday to pay off my dinner calls. Mrs. Simms is beginning to bore me with her eyes like two gimlets."

"Old Simms!" drawled Mrs. Reynolds. "Isn't she the Iron Duke? No need to put whalebone in *her* corset! I pity poor little Amy when he gets his ears boxed."

"What's his name?" asked Cicely, with interest. "He looks like a Luke,—like tepid water, or cold soup."

"He's an Amos," said Mrs. Reynolds, nibbling another sandwich with the languid grace under whose protection she consumed an astonishing amount of nourishment. "The boys call him Amy, so it does very well. Only I always thought it ought to be Aimless."

"She supplies the aim!" said Cicely. "What's *her* name?"

"Maria, of course!" replied Mrs. Reynolds. "What else could it be? — unless it was Boadicea. Do give me another cup."

"It's very curious," remarked Cicely, ministering to her guest, "that a vacuum-cleaner like her should have taken up with a little microbe like him. How do you account for it?"

"Law of Disagreement," averred Mrs. Reynolds oracularly. "The only thing that makes marriage endurable. What *do* you marry people for, if not to disagree with them?"

Cicely looked nonplussed: she was ashamed to avow her own milk-and-water motive for matrimony in the presence of this enlightened sophistication. "I never thought much about it," she evaded.

"Well, observe," directed Mrs. Reynolds. "You see it all about you. Kent is a whirlwind, I'm lazy as the deuce. Maria is cayenne and paprika, Amy is cream cheese. If married people agreed with each other, life would be a dismal bore. You're a case in point; you're champagne, your husband is — I don't know just what — oatmeal, or beefsteak, or anything solid and staid. It stands to reason you'll fight, and so your marriage will be justified."

Cicely winced a little; she had not expected to get as near home as this! Clarissa was, of course, wrong. And yet it was an attribute of Clarissa's wisdom to be almost infallibly right: and it was true, when one came to think of it, that she and Roger did not agree as she had supposed they would. She felt disturbed and uneasy, and, to hide her troubled face, she turned away and touched the bell for Hitty.

"We shall need some more sandwiches in a minute," she said, as that frank hand-maiden presented a disapproving face at the door. "Begin to make them now, and then they'll be ready when we are."

"I'll make ye plain bread-'n'-butter ones, then," said Hitty. "That patty-foy-grass stuff is most gone."

"Well, use what's left of it," said Cicely, "and we'll get some more. That's simple."

"It costs a dollar'n' a half a jar, Mis' Ford!" stated

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Hitty severely. "An' we've hed three jars now sence school begun to keep. It's enough to ruin John D. Rockefeller."

Cicely flushed. "That will do, Hitty," she said. "Please make them now, and bring them in when they are ready."

"Well, suit yourself," grumbled Hitty, departing. "All I c'n say is, patty-foy-grass'll make a fine pavin' for the road to the poorhouse."

"Isn't she a lark!" observed Mrs. Reynolds, munching another sandwich. "I'd rather have her than a phonograph."

"Yes, she's good fun, but she makes me dreadfully cross," said Cicely. "She *will* keep saying I'm extravagant."

"Well, for that matter," remarked Mrs. Reynolds tranquilly, "you are, of course."

"*I* extravagant!" exclaimed Cicely indignantly. "Why, Clarissa, what an idea! You're as bad as Mrs. Davidson!"

"You flatter me!" said Mrs. Reynolds, with her satirical smile. "Sister Davidson would call you extravagant as if it were a sin; I mean it for a compliment. Anybody who wasn't extravagant in this poverty-stricken life wouldn't have the spirit of a cow."

Cicely was relieved; it was cheering to have this expert encouragement. "Are you extravagant, then?" she asked.

"*Am I!*" said Mrs. Reynolds, with lazy gusto. "Ask Kent. He's come to the place now, when the bills come in, where he can't do anything but swear. I tell him

that if he expects to live on a labouring man's wages he ought to have married a chambermaid."

"That's what I tell Roger!" said Cicely; and then stopped short, blushing. She had never thought of saying such a thing to Roger; but she wished to shine before her brilliant friend, and now she was ashamed of having so poor a stock of conjugal repartee to draw on.

"Never mind, my life," said Mrs. Reynolds, with a smile of malicious comprehension. "You'll say it to him yet. Wait till you've been married five years, and you'll be astonished at the conversational powers you develop."

"Hitty takes a long time!" remarked Cicely, wincing again. "Perhaps she's decided that bread is too expensive, and gone out to pick us some grass. Oh no, she's coming; I hear her creaking across the dining-room."

"Ther's some folks comin' to see ye!" said Hitty, entering. "I seen 'em from the winder. Beats all the way the folks in this town go on,—traipsin' in 'n' out all day long, eatin' us out o' house 'n' home."

"They don't *all* have such appetites as I have, Hitty!" drawled Mrs. Reynolds.

"No 'm, they don't; that's one mercy," agreed Hitty heartily. "But averagin' 'em all up, they do eat scandalous. Makes me think o' my cousin Hiram's wife; she kep' boarders, an' she said —"

"I think you'd better answer the doorbell before you tell us," interrupted Cicely. "And take out this teapot, please, and bring the big one. We'll postpone the anecdotes until later." She pushed back her chair from

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the fireside, straightened the tea-table with a few deft touches, and, shaking her dainty, tumbled frock into order, turned gladly towards the door to greet the diversion.

Across the threshold, propelled by Hitty, came an elderly couple of curiously unworldly aspect,—a gaunt, bearded, abstracted-looking man, and a little flustered woman with an antiquated bonnet set much askew. Hitty, with one of those social inspirations peculiar to herself, placed their cards on a window-sill in a remote corner of the room, and departed, teapot still in hand. The two visitors, apparently totally oblivious of any need for their introducing themselves, stood waiting to be acclaimed, the man serenely, the little woman in a nervous flutter; Cicely, taken aback by the oddness of their appearance, hesitated for her cue; and Mrs. Reynolds, who alone held the key to the situation, sat enjoying it in malicious silence. There was a long, embarrassed pause, most unusual in that animated room. Then Cicely, spurring herself into the breach, went uncertainly forward.

“I am Mrs. Ford,” she said. “Did you come to see me?”

“We did, madam,” said the spectacled man. The little woman started nervously, and remained silent.

“Then,” said Cicely, covering her confusion with the pretty vivacity which she could always command, “we must tell our names, or we can’t begin to play. I said mine was Cicely Ford, didn’t I? What are yours?”

“Madam,” said the male visitor solemnly, “my name is Erasmus Jenkinson. I have the honour to be professor of Greek philology in this institution, a post which I

have held for nearly forty years, and in connection with which, I venture to say, my name is not unknown. This lady is Mrs. Jenkinson, my wife. I fear, however, you are under some misapprehension as to the purpose of our visit. We have come merely to make a social call, knowing and esteeming your husband, and being informed that you are a newcomer and bride; it is, I believe, an established custom. But you employ the word 'play'; whether you refer to billiards, chess, or this new pastime oddly designated 'bridge,' I do not know; but I fear you will find us ill prepared for any of these diversions."

Cicely's eyes danced. "I employed the word," she said, "in a metaphorical and perhaps ill-judged sense. My intention was to communicate a desire for social intercourse, not necessarily of a sportive nature. Will you be seated, and allow me to offer you refreshment?" Though, to save her life, she could not help imitating him, she did it with perfect courtesy, paying no attention to Mrs. Reynolds' mirth; pompous and stilted as the old gentleman was, there was about him an innate dignity and a faintly suggested pathos that compelled her respect. She seated the pair with careful consideration, and took her place at the tea-table.

"I have to ask you to wait until the kettle boils again," she said, "for Mrs. Reynolds and I had so little forethought as to have our tea before you came. You are acquainted with Mrs. Reynolds, of course? It is only I, the stranger and ignoramus, who find most faces unfamiliar here."

"The first of your disadvantages will soon be reme-

died by the sovereign touch of Time; and the second, I am persuaded, exists only in your own undue humility," said the old gentleman, with a stiff, courtly bow. "Yes, I am not unacquainted with Mrs. Reynolds. How do you do, madam? It is some time, I think, since I had the pleasure of an encounter with you."

Cicely, leaving him in the hands of her friend, turned to the little woman, who had not yet uttered an audible word.

"I find the hardest part of being a stranger is this matter of introductions!" she said, with that charming air of making a confidence which was, in her, a totally unconscious coquetry. "At first I thought all the people I met were as strange as I, and introduced everybody; and then it seemed that they all knew each other, and I didn't introduce any one; and now I find that some do and some don't, and I don't know *how* to act."

"Yes—yes,—" said Mrs. Jenkinson. "Yes indeed. I—I—yes."

"What do *you* do?" prompted Cicely. "I suppose you know by instinct who knows whom. I get very much embarrassed; for I'm officious if I introduce people who know each other, and rude if I don't introduce people who don't."

"Yes—oh no, I shouldn't put it *that* way,—" murmured Mrs. Jenkinson, a timid gleam lighting in her pale eyes as they rested on Cicely's lovely face, "that is—" Her courage failed her, and her voice trailed off indistinctly into silence again.

"What ails the woman?" thought Cicely impatiently. "Poor stupid little thing, she hasn't sense enough to

call her soul her own." She turned away with relief as Hitty entered with the large silver teapot. "Now you shan't go hungry any longer," she said, brightening. "Don't tell me you've had your tea already, or I shall be disappointed."

"No, we—we hardly ever take it—that is—I mean to say—" began the little woman; and then broke off, flushing painfully.

"But it can't hurt you, just a cup or two a day!" protested Cicely. "Professor Jenkinson!"—though she had fallen at once into the habit of the inner circle, of calling all these men of honourable title plain "Mr." except for purposes of introduction, her quick instinct perceived that this new specimen of the genus would prefer the more pompous address,—"you are fond of tea, I trust?"

"Tea, madam," said the professor, turning with mild avidity from his rather juiceless conversation with Mrs. Reynolds, "is a beverage that has been esteemed by our wise neighbours of the Orient throughout many of the centuries by which their civilization antedates ours. I follow, then, an estimable precedent when I avow a taste for it."

"You enter the illustrious society of the great lexicographer," rejoined Cicely, reverting promptly to his manner of speech. "I permit myself to cherish the hope that my concoction may find as appreciative a reception in you, as it might have in the inner fastnesses of that eminent man."

"But not, I trust, to the same immoderate extent!" exclaimed the professor. "I must protest against being

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laid under the charge of lack of appreciation if I fail to consume the Doctor's wonted eighteen cups!" He chuckled at his animated repartee, and blinked with astonished satisfaction in himself and his surroundings.

At this hilarious moment Hitty again drew aside the portière to admit two visitors. These were another married couple, as completely the opposites of the last comers as if they had been products of a different civilization: assurance,—veiled, courteous, but unmistakable,—was their note; they were well-fed, well-bred, well-dressed, and perfectly at ease. Although Hitty's social instinct prompted her this time to carry the cards back with her to the kitchen, there was no awkward pause. The incoming lady advanced with a subdued rich rustle to meet Cicely half way, saying at once, in a pleasant, conventional voice, "Mrs. Ford? I am Mrs. Drummond; this is my husband. We are fortunate to find you at home."

Cicely slipped easily and gratefully into this accustomed key. "It is I who am fortunate to be found," she said. "Mrs. Drummond, I am sure you know Mrs. Reynolds, and Mrs. Jenkinson, and Dr. Jenkinson. Mr. Drummond, I am very glad to meet you,—Mrs. Reynolds, Dr. and Mrs. Jenkinson,—Mr. Drummond."

Mrs. Reynolds bowed with her lazy grace, Mrs. Jenkinson gave a couple of flurried little nods, and Mrs. Drummond, greeting each rapidly, proceeded at once to ignore them all and seat herself beside Cicely. Mr. Drummond included the whole group in one of those unrestricted general bows with which busy men are apt to discharge their social obligations in a lump, and also

took a chair near Cicely. The two women, hostess and newly-arrived visitor, had already begun the inevitable veiled appraisal of each other's taste and attractiveness, and had both opened their lips for the conventional commonplaces, when suddenly Professor Jenkinson, who had been laboriously getting upon his feet, launched out upon them with an impressive exordium in the classic style.

"No, madam, I must inform you that you are in error; I have not previously had the privilege of this lady's and gentleman's acquaintance; I look forward to making it upon this occasion. But before I do so I must state, to you and to them, as well as to this other lady on my left, that you have conferred upon me a distinction to which I can lay no claim. I refer to the title of 'Doctor,' with which you have honorifically but unjustly embellished my name. I am not a doctor of philosophy. In the day, now somewhat distant, when I prepared for this worthy profession, the degree of master of arts was esteemed sufficient equipment; and that, I may say, I possess; but, though I deplore the circumstance, I fear it is now too late for me to acquire the more distinguished title. Having made this correction, I am glad, madam and sir, to avail myself of the opportunity afforded me by our hostess to inaugurate an acquaintance with you."

The old gentleman, having finished, looked about him blankly. He had risen to respond in fitting form to an introduction which he considered himself about to undergo, and now he found introducer and introduced calmly seated and well embarked on the next phase of the situation. He blinked in bewilderment behind his spec-

tacles. Mr. and Mrs. Drummond, quite unaware of what was expected of them, gazed at him in polite astonishment, Mrs. Reynolds made no attempt to hide her mocking smile, and Cicely, embarrassed and troubled, was at a loss what to do. The situation hung fire for a difficult moment.

Oddly enough, it was little Mrs. Jenkinson who rescued it. As her half-frightened glance fled around the circle, she saw Mrs. Reynolds' satirical smile, and a dull flush mounted over her small, faded face. With a sudden decisiveness which no one would have supposed possible to her, she also rose to her feet.

"Yes, we're very glad to have met you," she said, quite clearly and firmly, "and now,—you are right, Erasmus,—we must go. Good day, all."

"Oh, please don't hurry away!" exclaimed Cicely, starting up. "It's far too soon! Sit down and let us all have a little chat together."

"Thank you; we must go," repeated Mrs. Jenkinson resolutely. "Good-bye, Mrs. Ford. Come, father." She put her hand within her husband's arm, and gently pushed him,—still some minutes behind the situation,—to the door.

"What an odd pair!" exclaimed Mrs. Drummond, settling herself comfortably. "Just one lump, please, Mrs. Ford. As I was saying, we are peculiarly fortunate to find you, because our opportunities for seeing you are to be limited." She studied Cicely's toilette with critically approving eyes while she spoke: in her own way she too was perfectly dressed, with a rich

severity which suited her excellent figure, rather plain face, and decisive personality.

Cicely, unable to dismiss a lingering uneasiness over the abrupt departure of her other visitors, listened with a divided mind. "Are you thinking of travelling?" she asked perfunctorily.

"Oh, we're always on the wing," said Mrs. Drummond. "We shall be off in a week; and though we *say* it's only to California, I fancy we shall end by keeping on around the world."

"How delightful!" said Cicely. "I should love to see the Orient."

"Yes, it's odd," said Mrs. Drummond. "It's not particularly agreeable, but then one gets so tired of the inevitable European routes. How do you like Cheltenham? Charming, isn't it?"

"Very pleasant!" said Cicely, with an imperceptible grimace at Mrs. Reynolds over the familiar question.

"It's adorable," said Mrs. Drummond decidedly. "And now, Mrs. Ford, what evening can you give us for dinner before we go?"

Cicely came out of her hovering abstraction with a start. "But—but—*dine* with you!" she exclaimed. "Why, I thought you were going in a week!"

"So we are; I know it's abrupt," said Mrs. Drummond: "but you see we've really no time for ceremony."

"But," protested Cicely, "you don't know yet whether you'll like us or not."

"We'll risk that!" said Mrs. Drummond; indeed it was obvious that she had already conceived a decided

approval of Cicely. "Just name a day; that's all I ask."

Cicely hesitated; she rather liked Mrs. Drummond, and Clarissa was urging her noiselessly with her lips, "Oh, go! go!" but it annoyed her to be rushed off her feet. Yet there was something in Mrs. Dummond's evident habit of success in the past, and expectation of success in the future, that seemed to make yielding inevitable. Her resistance was brief.

"We've only one evening free in that time," she said doubtfully.

"What is it?" pressed Mrs. Drummond. "If it doesn't fit my plans, I'll make my plans fit it."

"Wednesday," said Cicely. "But I don't know—"

"Wednesday it is!" said Mrs. Drummond, briskly. "At half-past seven. And now, Mrs. Ford, I must leave you. I have to rearrange next week a little, and then there are a thousand things to see to before we go. Good-bye; I'm so grateful to you. Good-day, Mrs. Reynolds." She rustled rapidly out, her husband following with one of his brief comprehensive bows.

"Well," drawled Mrs. Reynolds, "there's an object-lesson for you!"

"An object-lesson of what?" demanded Cicely, somewhat ruffled. "What a queer invitation! Why in the world did I accept it?"

"You accepted because you simply couldn't help it," stated Mrs. Reynolds. "It's an object-lesson of the divine power of wealth,—the power that all these high-minded geese pretend to scorn, the power that keeps 'em all dancing. Look at that woman; she's not young, she's

not pretty, she's not clever, and yet she's charming; she charmed you so that you accepted her invitation without meaning to; she charmed me so that I sat within perfectly plain hearing of it,—knowing that it ought to have included me and didn't,—and never got up the ghost of a grudge. That's what money can do. That poise,—that potency,—that heavenly assurance! Oh, give me a sandwich; I'm getting lyrical."

Cicely looked doubtful. "Aunt Lucille always said it was bad form to talk about money," she said.

"Well, it may be bad form to *talk* about it," returned Mrs. Reynolds, "but to worship it,—to bend the knee to it,—why, that's the chief end of man."

Cicely frowned, toying with the tea-things. This wise mentor of hers set her puzzling lessons. "What are they doing here, anyway?" she demanded presently.

"Worshipping the high-brows,—the usual millionaire pose," scoffed Mrs. Reynolds. "They think, because they aren't in it, that the learned life is paradise. I'd like to give them a taste of it, and see what a face they'd make! But you'll observe that even they only kowtow to the successful ones. They made short work of old Whiskers there, I'd like you to remember."

"Oh, poor old things!" said Cicely. "I do wonder what made them hurry off so."

"I wonder!" said Mrs. Reynolds, smiling mockingly. "Well, they'd bored us long enough, anyway. And there's another object-lesson. That poor old simpleton really has brains, in his own line, and if he'd ever had one penny to rub on another he might have been somebody. And that woman, that little ridiculous feather-

duster,— if you'll believe me, there's a legend that when she came here she was young and pretty and spirited. It's the old story,— married on nothing, had a child every five minutes,— sickness, clothes, food, schooling, to pay for,— he with his head in the clouds, she on her knees scrubbing the floor. Inspiring, isn't it? Now the children are all either dead or disgraced; and those two old geese are still scraping and scrimping to pay up what they cost. Pah, it makes me sick. Give me another cup, and I'll go home."

"Poor, poor old souls!" exclaimed Cicely, aghast. "What a life! And — Why, Clarissa! — they never even had any tea!"

"Serves them right!" said Mrs. Reynolds, taking her own cup coolly. "It's their own silly fault. And there's a moral in that too. The Jenkinsons don't get two square meals in a week, and off they go, their noses in the air, with *paté-de-foie-gras* sandwiches just shouting at them to be eaten. The Drummonds have a house that's simply crammed to bursting with lusciousness; and do they pass by a cup of orange pekoe at five dollars a pound, when they get a chance at it? Not they. Come, I've really finished. Good-bye, love: don't forget to write all these my laws in your heart, I beseech you!" She gathered her wraps and tapped Cicely's cheek with a light gesture of farewell, smiling amusedly at her troubled look.

Cicely stood frowning out of the window, while her friend's elegant figure trailed leisurely down the street. What a twisted tangle these surroundings of hers were! Roger and the others thought that brains were every-

thing; but the all-wise Clarissa had just made it plain to her that brains were a rather despicable commodity, and that money, the conspicuous absentee, was the one omnipotent power. And marriage, which she had supposed such a simple affair of living happily ever after, now appeared a strange and doubtful game of offence and defence, dangers and difficulties: while as for motherhood,—at which so far she had only glanced with the shy, shining eyes of the very young wife,—that, it seemed, led to unsuspected horrors of wrinkles, poverty and dowdiness. How curiously complicated, how unexpectedly disturbing, life was! so many surprising developments and revelations, such long, perplexing vistas!

“However,” said Cicely aloud, sighing and shrugging, and turning away from the window, “that’s only life in a college town. Real life, of course, is altogether different.”

IV

MORE DIPLOMACY

"ROGER," said Cicely, looking up from her book to peer at him, where he sat at work on the other side of the big reading-lamp, "I want to have a dinner."

"All right, dear," answered Roger, without looking up. "Have one."

"But I want to talk about it!" said Cicely indignantly. "A dinner is important; you can't just settle it with a h'm-h'm."

Roger patiently pushed back his papers and lifted his head, and as his eyes fell upon her face his slow smile dawned and shone. He had a special smile for Cicely alone, compact of tenderness and adoration; it lighted his face whenever she entered his presence or his thoughts, as a special strain invades the music of an opera when a certain character comes near.

"Well, if it must be talked about, come here and talk about it properly!" he said.

Cicely shook her head, frowning perversely. "How can we waste time sitting on laps, when there's a dinner to be discussed?" she demanded. "Essential things first; frills afterwards."

"Now you're Pixie, when you look like that," said Roger, half to himself; "but Cicely's in you somewhere — Cicely, Cicely — the sweetest name in the world — Cicely!"

"Did you hear me say," said Cicely severely, "that I was going to give a dinner? It will be on the ninth of November, a week from Wednesday."

"All right," acquiesced Roger. "And the first people invited will be the Davidsons."

"No," said Cicely decidedly. "The first people invited will be the de Mullens."

"But why?" asked Roger. "They're nothing to us; we don't care two straws about them."

"We owe them a dinner," said Cicely.

Roger frowned. "I don't hold with this notion of bartering hospitality," he said. "Our home is for our friends. And anyway, if it *is* a matter of returning, Mrs. Davidson gave a reception for us; and we went there to dinner too."

"It was only a family dinner," said Cicely calmly, "and Clarissa says those don't count. I'll look after the reception later. This dinner is for the people it's really important to entertain."

"There's no one more important than the Davidsons, our dearest friends!" protested Roger. "Have them first, and the others later."

"No, I must have these immediately," affirmed Cicely, "because Clarissa is going to New York to-morrow, and coming back on the fifteenth."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Roger. "Why must you have it while she's gone? I thought you and she were such friends."

"That's just the reason," explained Cicely. "I shall have to fight her husband; I always do; and I'm so fond of her that I hate to do it before her."

Roger laughed with a hint of irritation. "That's a good reason for slighting my best friends!" he said. "Why should you fight Reynolds? I'd much rather you'd fight his wife; she's the noxious one."

Cicely stiffened her straight young back. "Kindly leave *my* friends alone," she said, "as I leave yours. I will tell you my list, and then I must go and write the invitations. I am inviting the de Mullens, the Simms', the Reynolds', and the Kaltenborns. That makes eight at the table, Mr. Kaltenborn and Mrs. Reynolds being away."

"Cicely, what do you want with such an assemblage of misfits?" asked Roger impatiently. "There's not one in the lot that we care for, or that cares for us."

"Really, Roger!" exclaimed Cicely, "you don't show much penetration! I am inviting them, of course, to serve your interests; and I must say I don't get a great deal of appreciation for it."

Roger controlled his rising irritation with an effort. "Sweetheart," he said, "truly, you're making a mistake. You think you're a dark, deep well, but as a matter of fact you're a crystal brook. Anybody can see what you're up to, those people first of all; you can't even fool yourself ten minutes running. You know very well you'll tire of this diplomacy scheme before they reach the soup. Give it up, dear; entertain our own friends simply and sincerely, and don't bother your precious head with double-dealing that's not fit for it."

Cicely rose. "Roger," she said coldly, "I am not a child, and I know what I am about. Have the goodness not to interfere in my plans. I intend to help you, no

matter how hard you make it for me; and I shall do it in my own way." Turning away, she walked with decision to her desk, and Roger, sighing, settled to his papers again.

Cicely wrote her notes with a rapid, decided pen, her dimpled chin set firmly. How dense men were! and Roger, apparently, the densest of them. It was fortunate for him that she was magnanimous enough to serve him in spite of his blindness. She extracted a glow of self-satisfaction from this thought, and warmed herself at it as long as she could; but underneath, all the time, an uneasy pain rankled. This game of marriage was a strange, tormenting affair; it must indeed be governed, as her counsellor had said, by the law of disagreement, for she and Roger were now more often in conflict than in accord. And yet it had begun in such joyful, harmonious play! She told herself, biting at her pen, that the fault must be Roger's, that he could not be the man she had supposed him; and yet, even while she framed the thought, her heart leaped up in angry refutation,—more and more each day, in the midst of all the petty frictions, she learned the greatness of Roger's hidden beauty. But the only remaining explanation was that she was to blame; and that was obviously absurd and untenable. She pushed the whole sore subject impatiently away, and went to the piano.

Cicely had always sung. Her voice was her natural means of expression. But though it came from her as spontaneously as breathing, and though technically it had been trained along conventional drawing-room lines, there was a strange quality in it apparently at variance

with her whole light nature. Even in her gayest moods a mysterious depth and gravity pervaded it, and at times it melted suddenly into a solemn sweetness so poignant as to catch at the throats of the hearers. In speaking and singing it was a warm contralto, vibrant with life, full of lovely modulations and unexpected cadences. Roger, who was as sensitive to sound as he was himself inexpressive, loved it like a separate entity, passionately and with wonder. It stirred his physical senses almost to tears; and it had for his spirit a mystical significance; he felt it to be the real Cicely, the soul of Cicely, his visioned Cicely shown forth. But he could never tell the bright everyday Pixie of his secret feeling.

Now, as she sang, with determined gaiety, a sparkling French *chanson*, and her voice melted with every fall into that ineffable grave tenderness, his throat tightened and his hands clenched. "I want her, I want her!" he prayed within himself. "O God, give me my Cicely!"

§

The invitations to the dinner were all accepted promptly: though most of the guests viewed Cicely with distrust, she was already so much of a social light that none of them dreamed of slighting her. She imparted the news to Roger with satisfaction; he congratulated her courteously; and by tacit agreement (prompted on her side by anxiety for the success of her entertainment, and on his by the universal masculine desire for peace at any price), they relegated the subject to the background, until the actual day of the event.

"I suppose, Pixie," said Roger, as he was starting off in the morning, "I should make myself really useful if I didn't come home to luncheon. There'll be so much doing in the kitchen that nobody'll be able to think of such a superfluity as a husband."

"Not a bit of it," said Cicely. "We shall go on just as usual. There's nothing extra to do but get out the silver and arrange the flowers, and that won't take long."

"But all that festival grub!" said Roger. "Why, Hitty will be standing on her head."

"Oh no, she won't," contradicted Cicely. "I'm much too good a manager to upset my house and starve my poor old Badger just because a few people are coming to dinner. I put the whole thing in the hands of a caterer, and there's not a thing to worry about."

"A caterer!" repeated Roger. "Cicely! Wasn't that rather—rather rash?"

"No, really, it wasn't," said Cicely. "I got a good one. I got LeFils; he served that delicious dinner we had at the Drummonds', and Mrs. Drummond told me she often calls him in when she's short of servants. We can have perfect confidence in him."

"I don't doubt that," said Roger, rather dryly. "My only lack of confidence is in my bank account. Have you thought to inquire what the thing will cost?"

"Certainly I have," said she proudly; "I inquired as soon as I had engaged him. Two dollars and a half a cover, and fifteen dollars for service. It sounds awfully cheap, doesn't it? but it's really good; he submitted the menu."

"Thirty-five dollars for one dinner," said Roger

slowly. "Do you know how much my salary is, Cicely?"

"A hundred and eighty whole dollars a month!" returned Cicely promptly. "Just think, I could almost get six dinners out of it! And another month's salary coming in only two weeks, too."

"Yes, and out of that month's salary," said Roger, "food for our three selves for all this month, and coal, and light, and water, and Hitty's wages, and your fancy laundress, and a dozen other things to pay. It ought to have carried us through next month, and instead it will leave us behind-hand with this. Don't you think, dear,—couldn't you have thought,—to consult me before you took such a step?"

The ready flush rose to Cicely's cheeks. "What a question, Roger!" she exclaimed. "I took all the care and responsibility of this dinner to save you, because you were opposed to it; and now you reproach me with not having spoken of it! You are too unreasonable!"

"It's wisest and best to speak about some things, Cicely," said Roger, looking miserable. "This is an expense we can't afford. You know very well that we are poor."

"Poor!" flashed Cicely angrily. "I've been poor all my life; I never had a penny but what my uncle gave me; but this haggling, this stickling at the barest necessities—I must say it's a new experience for me! Do you expect me to further your cause by feeding these people on Hitty's fish hash? Do you think you'll conciliate them by sending them away starved?"

Roger, holding himself in hand, looked at her in

silence for a moment, and the logical answer died on his tongue. Why expect reason or helpfulness from any one so lovely, so made and trained for ornament alone? Fettered by the distorted chivalry of American men, he fell without resistance into that monstrous delusion which chooses to make of the woman a scented vampire, and to arrogate the whole privilege of sacrifice and service to the male.

"Well, dear," he said gently, "it's done. It's too late now to talk; I won't say anything more about it."

"It's about time to stop!" said Cicely bitterly. "I didn't know that being poor made people begrudge their families the common necessities of life."

§

The natural result of this conversation was that both appeared on the scene of the evening's activities at high pressure, Cicely very flushed, and Roger rather pale. Both had brooded much throughout the day. Roger, even while he strove to put his own view-point entirely aside, had suffered in the outraging of his strong inherent sense of justice, and his idealizing love; and Cicely's bitter words had cut deep. As for Cicely, she was full of angry revolt at the unreasonableness of Roger's remonstrances, and the evident sordidness of his mind. They met with constraint, and spoke briefly and coldly of indifferent matters while they waited for their guests to arrive.

The first to come were Dr. and Mrs. Simms; one knew to look at Mrs. Simms that she could never be late. They entered the drawing-room exactly three minutes

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ahead of time, the lady taut and bulging and perfectly equal to any occasion, her lord straggling breathlessly behind her. It was an odd circumstance about this pair that Mrs. Simms, who carried some fifty pounds more avoirdupois than her Amos, had complete control of her breathing and speaking apparatus even in moments of the greatest stress, while he, for all his spidery ease of locomotion, puffed and stammered on the slightest provocation,— another obvious instance of the ascendancy of mind over matter.

“ How do you do, Mrs. Ford! ” said Mrs. Simms, marching up to Cicely like an invading army. “ I hope we’re not too early. I always allow five minutes for difference in clocks, and I find it an excellent system; but I was thrown out of my calculations to-night by the fact that our most infallible clock had run down.”

“ It was my fault, I fear,” ventured her husband, offering a limp hand, “ for having forgotten to wind it.”

“ I did not intend to mention the fact,” said Mrs. Simms, magnanimously. “ But it’s another proof of the rule, ‘ If you want a thing well done, do it yourself.’ ”

The delight that Cicely always took in Mrs. Simms’ conversation came to her aid, and pricked her into animation.

“ You couldn’t come too early! ” she assured them. “ If the clock’s running down brought you any sooner, I shall give the credit to Providence and not to Mr. Simms. But as a matter of fact you’ve just allowed me ‘ hostess’s grace.’ I think the others are coming in now.”

“ I trust so,” said Mrs. Simms severely. “ Unpunctuality is a vice at the best of times; and at dinner, with

the gravy to be considered, it is a crime. I should hate to see any signs of it in the Department."

Under the pressure of her accusing glance the portières opened, and Mrs. Kaltenborn and Dr. Reynolds appeared. A more oddly mated couple could hardly have been imagined,—she placid, slow, comfortably dowdy in a loose-girt black satin gown of ancient vintage, he keen and alert, and modish to the verge of foppery. Cicely's eyes danced as she watched her arch-foe trying to match his impatient stride to his companion's turtle-like plodding.

"Ve come togedder!" announced Mrs. Kaltenborn, somewhat superfluously. "My husbant, he's avay, and Mrs. Reynolds, she issn't here, so Mr. Reynolds he catch me up in a carratch."

"I hope it won't make a scandal!" said Cicely. "Good-evening, Mr. Reynolds. I'm so sorry Clarissa couldn't come."

"Clarissa will hate to miss it," said Dr. Reynolds pointedly, meeting Cicely's look with full appreciation of the situation. His eyes held a conflict of expressions,—admiration of her beauty and charm, hostility to her hostility: on deeper knowledge he could either have loved or hated her, but could never have been her friend; and she, perceiving this, was always under an oddly agreeable tension of excitement in his presence.

The de Mullens, of course, came last, as was to be expected of such new devotees of fashion. Mrs. de Mullen had for this occasion discarded her lately acquired standards of academic simplicity,—discerning in Cicely a foe-man worthy of her steel,—and appeared so plumply blazing in sequins and jewels that she looked like a

replica of the noonday sun. Mr. de Mullen followed inconspicuously in the wake of his coruscating wife. He was a fat, red, silent little man; he considered that he sustained his share of the family magnificence by paying the bills, and his wife shared his opinion.

"Howdy-do, Mrs. Ford! Howdy-do, Professor!" exclaimed Mrs. de Mullen, rustling up with her most beignly regal manner. "Chawmed to see you! Quite a delightful occasion, indeed! Quite a distanguy gathering!"

"Since you adorn it," said Cicely, "it can ask nothing more. So glad to see you, Mr. de Mullen. Shall we go in to dinner? Roger, will you take Mrs. de Mullen in; and Mr. Reynolds, Mrs. Simms; and Mr. Simms, Mrs. Kaltenborn; and Mr. de Mullen, will you be so charitable as to take me? Voilà — the procession's formed, now the band can begin to play."

Roger, who had greeted all these unwelcome guests with cold formality, offered his arm in silence to Mrs. de Mullen. He hated the whole affair,—the intriguing intention of it, the inappropriate display, the discord it had brought between him and Cicely: and his strong and rather stubborn nature refused to pretend a cordiality it did not feel. As the guests fell into line behind him, the chill of his demeanour infected them vaguely, and they all became silent too; the men shared, to a certain extent, his masculine dislike of this kind of thing, and the women were busy noting the variety and expensiveness of the flowers that filled the little house. The only conversationalists on the short journey across the hall were

Mr. de Mullen, who inquired of his hostess the whereabouts of the band of which she had spoken, and Cicely, who explained that her language had been figurative.

However, the little bustle of seating the guests, and the cheering atmosphere of a dinner-table expressly equipped for festivity, dissipated the first slight chill before it became oppressive. Mrs. de Mullen's renewed volubility covered Roger's silence, and Cicely's gaiety animated her own neighbourhood. The waiters moved with quiet-footed deftness, the food was perfection; the guests, though they viewed this lavish hospitality with varying emotions of astonishment, admiration and disapproval, united in giving it an appreciative reception; and Cicely, assuring herself that the success of the affair was now certain, gave up all anxiety by the time the fish arrived, and addressed her energies to the conquest of Mr. de Mullen.

"I've been very much interested to hear from Mrs. de Mullen of your building plans," she said, turning towards him with seductively charming enthusiasm.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Mr. de Mullen, politely but noncommittally.

"It must be great fun to build a house," suggested Cicely. "I should like to try it."

"Yes, ma'am," said Mr. de Mullen, without emotion.

"Which did you enjoy most, making the plans or seeing them carried out?" persisted Cicely courageously.

Mr. de Mullen hesitated, but her eyes lured him irresistibly to confidences. With a reckless impulse he cast aside his carefully inculcated discretion. "Well," he

confessed, "fact is, I haven't had much satisfaction out o' neither one. I'm not strong on culture, like Mrs. M.— de M., I should say."

"You'd rather have simplicity and comfort, wouldn't you?" said Cicely, gazing on him with large sympathetic eyes.

"That's it exactly!" exclaimed Mr. de Mullen, expanding under this unusual comprehension. "I like a good plain house where a man can sit around comfertble, without kickin' over gimcracks every time he budges. Now Mrs. M.— de M., that is— when she fixes up a house she does it tasty, with Venus de Midas in one corner and Venus de Medicine in the other, and a china dog in between. I know it's Art; but between you and me I don't care shucks about it."

"I get your point of view," said Cicely, "and I believe I agree with you."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Mr. de Mullen. "Why, I thought all ladies liked style." He regarded her for a moment with a puzzled look, obviously wondering whether she could be as truly cultured as he had supposed; then, accepting her as a kindred spirit, plunged deeper into confidences. "Well, Mrs. M., *she* didn't use to be so tasty. Time was when a nice plush rocker with a lace tidy on it was fancy enough for her. But when she once got started with those artchitect fellers there was no holdin' her; and now it's perglers outside and freskers in, till you can't scarcely find a place to sit."

"Drove you out of the kitchen, did they?" inquired Cicely sympathetically.

"Gosh, yes! years ago," said Mr. de Mullen. "And to tell the truth, I haven't known what solid comfort was since. When our chatter gets done—"

"Our shottoe!" exclaimed Mrs. de Mullen sharply, from the other end of the table.

Cicely turned in surprise at the interruption, and looked quickly for its cause. It was not far to seek. Roger, looking around the table in a conscientious effort to play his part as host, had caught Mrs. Simms telegraphing to Mrs. Kaltenborn her amazement at all this luxury. Annoyed and disapproving as he already was, the realisation of the covert comment that was going on around him had resolved his mood into one of shamed anger, and he had frozen into rigid silence. Now his disaffection, making itself felt by his neighbours, was spreading in a visible blight; on his one side Mrs. de Mullen, bursting with bottled conversation, sat red and indignant; on the other Mrs. Kalternborn, displeased but placid, chewed in cow-like silence; and the chill, creeping steadily, had begun to engulf the remoter diners as well. Cicely flung him an indignant glance, and hurried to the rescue.

"Mrs. de Mullen," she said, "have you told my husband about your researches into the subject of French architecture?"

"I have not, Mrs. Ford," replied Mrs. de Mullen majestically.

"Do tell him now," urged Cicely. "He'd be so interested."

"If the Professor would be interested," said Mrs. de Mullen severely, "I should be pleased to decant to him

on that or any other subject, in the cause of sociability."

"He'd be charmed," asseverated Cicely. "Tell him about your study of the Norman."

Mrs. de Mullen turned her head on its substantial pivot, and, fixing Roger with a stern eye, opened fire. "Having gone deeply into the Norman, Professor," she began, "I find it is not called Norman at all by the real connosures. They pronounce it Romanesky. At the same time, I do not feel, personally, that the Romans had anything to do with it, as they died before the Normans were born. William the Conqueror,—an ancestor of mine, ong passong—"

Cicely turned back to her neighbour, dimpling. "I suppose your wife is so well informed on these matters," she said, "that she could talk about them all the evening."

"Yes, ma'am, she could," said Mr. de Mullen, with a sigh.

Cicely's dimples deepened. "I judge you're not passionately attached to French architecture yourself," she suggested.

"Why, Mrs. Ford," said the little fat millionaire, with sudden tragic earnestness, "I'm a quiet man, but I get so sick o' those words,—Rennysance, and Ompeer, and Louis Cat-horse,—that sometimes I'm ready to set fire to the whole business,—chatter and arctchitects and books and all!"

"It wouldn't do you any good," said Cicely compassionately.

"No'm, I know it," said Mr. de Mullen, lapsing into despondency. "We're in for a chatter, and a chatter we will have. When I see those arctchitect fellers strut-

tin' around destroyin' men's peace and women's quiet, I wonder the Lord lets 'em live."

"Oh well," said Cicely, "there are worse things than building, you know."

"Yes; it might be slummin'; or votes," mused Mr. de Mullen; "or microbes,—one friend o' mine's wife took up microbes so violent that 'twas as much as his life was worth to smoke his pipe, without it'd ben boiled first. And o' course there's always the heathen. But on the whole, I do' know as there's anythin' much worse to live with, day in and day out, than a chatter."

"Mr. de Mullen," interrupted the voice of the cough-drop queen, trembling with suppressed indignation, "you will do well to refrain from talking about the shottoe, until you have learned to pronounce it!"

Cicely, with a shrug, abandoned her conversation and glanced around again. Mrs. de Mullen had already come to another deadlock with Roger, and, balked and outraged, was glaring furiously at her erring husband. He, already depressed, repented of his unwonted volubility, and subsided into silence. The other guests were speaking hardly a word; Dr. Simms looked dejected, Dr. Reynolds sardonic; with each journey of the quiet waiters Mrs. Simms' disapproving eyebrows climbed higher. It was evident that the diplomatic dinner was not following the course laid out for it.

Cicely flashed another angry look at her husband, and turned her attention to his other neighbour. Mrs. Kaltenborn, unlike Mrs. de Mullen, did not suffer in the least from suppressed social activity; though she was ready enough to be displeased with Roger, it was all one to

her, when she was absorbing such an excellent dinner as this, whether anybody talked or not. Cicely's hostess-ambition had but a doubtful ally in this placidly gorging lady. However, there was no choice. She reflected for a moment, and then plunged boldly into the sea of silence and plucked Mrs. Kaltenborn out by the hair.

"Mrs. Kaltenborn," she said, "I wish you'd tell Roger how those delicious German cakes of yours are made. We must have some; and *I* shouldn't remember two minutes."

She had shrewdly struck the one responsive note. Mrs. Kaltenborn reluctantly laid down her fork and turned to Roger, her German-housewifely zeal kindling in her eyes. "Vell, you take first a half-a-cup of butter and varm it a liddle," she said, "and vork it vit de hand, so; and den you plunch your two hands in de sugar-bucket, like dis, and bring up *so* much." She interrupted herself to glance at Cicely with placid scorn. "Vill you make dem yourself, Professor, or can you teach de hired girl?" she asked.

Cicely's eyes danced again at this promising beginning, and, feeling the conversation safe for a few minutes more, she turned her attention to the other objects of her diplomacy. At once, as she glanced around the table, she encountered the gaze of her chief adversary fixed on her with that mingling of fascination and irritation which always stirred her to a subtle fever. Their eyes struck a spark as they met, and Cicely's travelled no further.

"Mr. Reynolds," she said, "I have hardly heard your voice to-night. Clarissa's absence makes you silent."

"It is rather," said he, bowing to her ironically over

his glass, "excess of joy in finding myself at your board. You are giving us a most impressive entertainment."

"I trust," said Cicely, unable to keep from challenging him, "it appeals as strongly to your intellect as to your gastronomy!"

"How could it fail to," he inquired, "with you present?"

Cicely kindled into rashness. "Oh, my part in your entertainment has been negligible so far," she said, "but I intend to contribute some little item before you go."

Reynolds kindled too. "Kindly let me know," he returned, "when you are ready to begin. Forewarned is fore-armed."

"Two arms are arms enough for you!" countered Cicely, her eyes beginning to sparkle with excitement. "I'm the one who needs four. We hear a lot about 'arms and the man,' but nobody ever seems to think the woman needs arming."

"A lady's arms," ventured Dr. Simms, entering the conversation so unexpectedly that its participants jumped, "are more powerful than any weapons."

"Amos!" said Mrs. Simms severely. "Don't talk nonsense!"

"It's the truth, my dear," avowed Dr. Simms,—flushed, but firmly perched on his startling height of gallantry. "I know it is not always a literal fact,—though your own arms would go far to establish that claim as well,—but it must be granted that the moral and spiritual potency of arms like — er — our hostess's — is — er — inestimable."

"Amos Simms," said his lady indignantly, "it's well

you're in a company where you're known as a scientist, or somebody'd be arresting you for unsound mind!"

At this, suddenly and sharply another unexpected voice spoke up from across the table. "Vell," it said, "I say dis for his mind, it sounds louder dan some odder minds here present!" And lo, Mrs. Kalternborn,—done with her precious recipe, and waiting in vain for Roger's gratitude,—frowned upon them in an indignation so profound that she was forgetting to eat.

With this last interruption, suddenly Cicely's whole mood flared up in angry revolt. She looked at the circle of faces,—every one stamped with some shade of dissatisfaction or chagrin,—and at Roger, the storm-centre of all that social wreck, sitting stark and stony in the midst. This was the man she was trying to serve, and this his manner of requiting her service! Very well, then! She had finished. Let Roger take care of his own interests, and ruin himself as he pleased.

Completely abandoning all concern, she hurried the meal to a conclusion, and jumped to her feet so suddenly that the glowering guests all turned to her open-mouthed. "I hate to break up this interchange of soul!" she said ironically, "but I see the men longing for cigars and confidences, and we women must have our little secrets. Let us go!" And, recklessly indifferent to results, she led her feminine cohorts rapidly from the room, and left Roger silent and grim in the midst of his sulky adversaries.

As she reached the drawing-room, however, and surveyed the glum faces of her followers, a spirit of dare-devil mischief took possession of Cicely. If the occa-

sion was a failure, at least she would extract some amusement from it; she did not care now what the consequences might be. Sparkling maliciously, she drew the smallest of her chairs into an intimate circle, and installed her plump guests upon them, and her own slim person in the middle.

"Isn't this sweet, to be so cosy!" she cooed. "Now, let's talk about clothes. I hear the *jupe-culotte* is going to be tried again this winter; shall you adopt it, Mrs. Simms?"

"No, Mrs. Ford, I shall not!" said Mrs. Simms, sitting very stiff and straight on her narrow chair. "Those Paris fashions have no seductions for me, I am happy to say!"

"No — really?" returned Cicely. "What a pity! With your figure, it would be so striking. Thin people like me have no chance at those marked effects. There's Mrs. de Mullen's beautiful gown; how I wish I had a gown like that! — but how should I look in it? — like a ton of sequins, and nothing more!"

Mrs. de Mullen, touched in a tender spot, emerged a little from her cloud of displeasure. "I'm glad you like it," she said with complacence. "I think myself it is quite retchitchay. I am thinking of ordering a dozen sequinated gowns in different colours, to wear with the various apartments of my shottoe."

"How original!" said Cicely admiringly. "Would you spend the whole evening in one spot, or change as you went from room to room? It would be so interesting for your guests to watch you cross a threshold!"

Mrs. de Mullen bridled. "I shall find some way to

circumscribe that difficulty," she said haughtily. "I have never appeared in public *au naturel*, and I never intend to." She began to execute a queenly shrug, but her little chair creaked ominously, and she forbore.

"Vell, I don't haf to bodder vit clo'es," said Mrs. Kaltenborn comfortably; cheered by coffee, she had regained something of her usual placidity. "I got goot clo'es now. Look at dis dress; I got it thirty years yet, and it come arount again in style tree times alretty."

"Fancy being able to wear the same bodice thirty years!" exclaimed Cicely. "How do you do it — by diet?"

"Vell, partly; ven I had it ten years first, I dyed it," said Mrs. Kaltenborn reflectively. "First time it vas yellow, now I got it black. I tink anodder year maybe I get it trimmed vit yellow again; it's vearing out arount de bottom alretty."

"When you get through with it, I wish you'd bequeath it to me," said Cicely. "I'd love to have such a tried and true friend. My dresses hardly last me thirty minutes."

"I should think that was as much as could be expected of such dresses!" remarked Mrs. Simms, with a withering glance at Cicely's shoulders gleaming through white tulle. "What keeps you from a consumptive's grave I can't imagine."

"Oh, I'm not very strong on consumption!" said naughty Cicely, "as you can tell by my figure. I wish I could take lessons from some solider ladies."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Simms indignantly; and she too embarked upon a scornful shrug, and was checked, as

Mrs. de Mullen had been, by the creaking of her chair. The other two, though slower of mind, comprehended that some veiled disrespect had been cast at them, and subsided into sulks. Cicely herself was too full of inward laughter to speak; and so for a space a pregnant silence reigned.

At this propitious moment the men stalked,— Indian-file, morose and glum,— into the room. Cicely, all alight now with mischief, hailed them gleefully. “Welcome to our city!” she cried. “How flattering of you to leave your hilarity so soon! We were just going to talk complexions; do join us.” She jumped up as she spoke, rearranging the group perversely and skilfully: Dr. Reynolds was seated by Mrs. de Mullen, Roger was flanked by Dr. Simms and the lozenge king, and Cicely herself slipped between Mrs. Simms and Mrs. Kaltenborn, who still perched precariously on their little chairs. What slight chance of sociability there might have been was thus effectually annihilated; and she surveyed the glum result with eyes in which recklessness danced visibly.

“What, no contributions on the subject of complexions?” she said. “Then we must try the weather. Very warm for the time of year, isn’t it?”

No one offered any reply. Dr. Simms opened his mouth, but was quelled by the stern eye of his spouse; Mr. de Mullen was too depressed for further conversational efforts; the women were all sulking; and Dr. Reynolds, though amused in spite of himself, was furiously angry. Oddly enough, Roger alone,— courteous, considerate Roger,— looked at his wicked wife with ap-

proval: attributing to her his own single-mindedness, he thought she was showing these people that she would cajole them no more with false friendship, and he rejoiced in the change.

Cicely caught Reynolds' intense gaze of warring anger and admiration, and responded with a fresh upleaping of rashness. "Oh, Dr. Reynolds," she said, "we haven't had our little conversazione, have we? Let's begin now; it's charming to talk soul to soul, surrounded by sympathetic ears."

"Very well!" said Dr. Reynolds shortly; he knew as well as she that an encounter in this surcharged atmosphere meant disaster, but was unable to resist her. "What's the subject?"

"Oh, any thing is interesting between friends!" said Cicely. "Politics,—or the stage,—or—what's nearest our hearts—the Department!"

Everybody started, and Roger, with a warning cough, tried to catch her eye. "Politics!" he said hastily. "That's what we are all most interested in."

"To be sure—Department politics!" said Cicely, disregarding the warning, and rushing ahead full tilt. "What do you think is the best way of running a department such as ours, Dr. Reynolds? I assume that you feel well fitted to judge."

Reynolds sat up with a brusque movement. Even he had not expected such thin ice as this; and yet he found something gallant in her recklessness, and could not keep his admiration out of his eyes. "I should say," he retorted, taking up her challenge, "that the first rule would

be to get the women out of the way, and keep them where they can't possibly put their spoons into the broth!"

"Tie up the women!" exclaimed Cicely. "But that's going back to the Dark Ages! Why, where would men and politics be now without women? Where would you be without Clarissa?"

"In about the same place," said he, looking at her steadily, "that Ford would be in without you."

"And that is—" began Cicely incautiously.

"In the Bachelor Flats on Juniper Street!" interrupted Roger. "A very good place to be out of, as every married man knows. Cicely, won't you sing us something?" For although he was loath to share the treasure of her voice with these alien spirits, he felt that further conversation must be prevented at all costs.

"I might sing 'I Dreamed I Dwelt in Marble Halls,'" she said, looking maliciously at her adversary.

"Or you might sing 'It Was but Idle Dreaming,'" he returned, his eyes snapping with responsive malice.

"Or," flashed Cicely, completely oblivious now of all prudence, "of course there's 'The Last Hope'! And I could finish with 'Farewell Forever.'"

Reynolds bounded out of his chair, anger completely gaining the upper hand of amusement. "I'll save you the trouble, and say farewell now!" he exclaimed. "Thank you for a most stimulating evening. Good night, Ford." He strode out in a white heat of wrath, entirely forgetting the plump lady in his charge.

His departure was the signal for the guests,—bottling various degrees of indignation, to accord with the vary-

ing degrees of their perceptiveness,— to rise by a common impulse, and utter their cold farewells. Not all could have told why they were angry, yet angry they all were, with the exception of Mr. de Mullen,— who, being little accustomed to social affairs among the aristocracy of intellect, supposed that this one had followed the usual order. Cicely, jumping up with alacrity, stood by the drawing-room door and sped their parting with no pretence of regret, pricking each one with a winged shaft of malice. “Good-bye, Mrs. Simms,— do come again, and bring your husband! Good-bye, Mrs. de Mullen; let me know when you get your series of lightning-change costumes ready,— I want to see you do it! Good-bye, Mrs. Kaltenborn; I’m going to live on those cakes of yours, and see if *I* can’t get a permanent figure!” So the mocking imp in her laughed at them and at herself, heedless and wanton. Yet strangely, when she found herself saying farewell to the little pudgy millionaire, whom she had docketed as the least notice-worthy of the lot, a tardy pang of conscience smote her. The tight grasp of his hand penetrated through her armour of wilfulness, and touched the living Cicely within; he looked at her with eyes of genuine devotion, and before his earnest, humble look, she dropped her own with a hot sense of shame.

The last guest was gone. Roger, coming to her side, looked at her half-disapprovingly, half-tenderly. “Well, naughty child!” he said. “You’ve amused yourself, haven’t you?”

Cicely turned away from him. The sparkle of her

mischief was dying in her like bubbles in stale champagne, and she was sick of it all. "Oh, don't talk to me!" she said. "What a fool, what a beast, I am!"

Roger smiled at her vehemence. "You're a wicked little Pixie," he said, "and you've certainly behaved very badly to-night; but you did it to please me, and I forgive you willingly."

"You forgive me!" cried Cicely. "What have *you* to forgive me for? I plan for you, worry for you, work for you,—and you reward me by wrecking everything I accomplish,—and then, when I give up and let it stay wrecked, you come talking to me of forgiveness!" She whirled round upon him again, her sense of injury, shame and anger at herself, and the tension of over-strung nerves, all whipping her into passion.

"Why, Cicely! Why—Cicely—" stammered Roger, appalled. "What do you mean? Didn't you give up your plan because I hated it? Weren't you helping me to stand on my own feet?"

"Helping you!" said Cicely hotly. "I'm done with helping you! I could help you till I died, and never get anything but ingratitude for it. Hereafter you may help yourself!"

"Cicely!" gasped Roger, growing very white. "Do you mean me to understand—"

"Understand what you will!" flamed Cicely. "I'm done with it, I tell you! I'm done, I'm done!" And, flying away from his outstretched arms, she ran blindly up the stairs, a fierce whirlwind of passion.

So ended this diplomatic episode: with the guests has-

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tening homeward ruffled and resentful; Roger white, rigid and aghast in the hall; and Cicely sobbing her wild heart out on her pillow. It was a large result for a fledgling diplomat.

V

AN ADVENTURE IN ARCADY

THE days passed, and Cicely's disastrous diplomacy passed with them into history. Roger and Cicely had apologized, had kissed again and taken up their daily life as before. Cicely had exercised all her witchery, and soothed and smoothed her ruffled guests into some semblance of amicability. But suspicion lurked in the glances of Mrs. Simms and Mrs. de Mullen; the men opposed Roger openly at every turn; and in Roger and Cicely's house of life there was one more pale ghost, prowling unsleeping behind a door that would not lock.

Towards the end of November, when the earth had cowered into passive readiness for winter, there came straight out of heaven a summer morning steeped in sunshine,—one of those golden Indian-summer days that fill the mind with a sense of things precious and fleeting, and call the invitation of out-of-doors more imperatively than spring itself. Cicely, rising jaded and weary in spirit, heard a belated bird-song, and looked out to see the stiff brown oak-leaves shining on the branches; and a well of young hope and happiness gushed warmly up within her. She dressed rapidly, and, hurrying down-stairs with brighter eyes and cheeks than she had worn for many a day, ran to Roger with hands outstretched as she used to do before the ghosts came.

"Oh, what a day, Badger!" she cried. "We'll drop everything, won't we, and go a-Novembering! I'll tell Hitty to make us up a lunch, and we'll wander in the woods, and camp in a little dell, just the way we used to."

Roger kissed the hands and fed his eyes on the bright face, but he shook his head reluctantly. "I'd love to, dearest," he said, "better than anything in the world. But I can't; I'm not free."

"Why not?" demanded Cicely, drawing a little away from him. "It's Saturday; you have no classes."

"I know," said Roger, "but I've promised the morning to some fellows I'm coaching."

"Let them go!" said Cicely.

"I can't, Pixie," said Roger. "If it were any one else I would, joyfully; but these are fellows who are working, and can't get any free time but this."

Cicely withdrew her hands brusquely, and moved away to look at him. The working students were an old thorn in her flesh; more than once they had interfered with her plans, and Roger's devotion to them pricked her to jealousy. "Roger!" she said sharply. "You don't mean to tell me you are giving up your few free hours, and my pleasure, for those filthy janitors?"

"I don't like your phrase, Cicely," said Roger, his voice changing a little. "I'm helping, in a very small way, some fine courageous men who are my friends."

"And, as usual, you prefer their society to mine," said Cicely bitterly.

"Oh, Cicely!" said Roger. He was silent for a moment, then said simply, "I promised them."

Cicely flushed hotly, but turned to another issue. "Who pays you for this?" she demanded.

Roger began to look stern. "Is there no reward but money?" he asked. "Isn't there such a thing as doing for the pleasure of the deed?"

"Not in your work," said Cicely. "You're entirely too much of a philanthropist at best. Dr. Davidson told me that, with your ability, you could be making ten thousand dollars a year in business."

"What if I could?" said Roger stubbornly. "I'm working for something better than money, as every teacher is. Your business man may get a fortune; I get the happiness of serving science, and making citizens."

"Yes, and that's a great help in buying daily bread!" said Cicely. "We go without most of the necessities of life so that you can give yourself to this institution (that's just fattening on simple people like you), for next to nothing,— and then you mend matters by giving yourself to the riffraff at the bottom of it for nothing at all."

Roger grew paler, as Cicely flushed a more and more vivid rose-red. Both were very angry; and to both came the sickening memory of the last quarrel, and of the quarrel before the last. The unlocked door was open a little, and they heard the ghosts prowling horribly inside.

"Cicely," said Roger, keeping a determined hand on his self-control, "don't talk like this. It's not yourself; you got it from Mrs. Reynolds. Let's drop the subject until you can look at it differently."

But Cicely could not so easily recapture the leash, once the wild little beast of her temper had escaped her.

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"Yes, until you can blind me as you did at first!" she said. "I tell you once for all, it's too late. With or without Clarissa, I can see things now as they are."

"Perhaps," said Roger, grown very white, "you had better have seen them before. Perhaps you wish you had had your present wisdom before you found yourself in your present position."

"Perhaps I do!" flashed Cicely hotly. Then, with the door swinging wide, and the ghosts showing their grisly faces, she was suddenly panic-stricken. "Oh, no, no!" she cried. "Oh, I didn't mean that, Roger! You're right, we must stop — we must stop quickly!" She touched the bell with frightened fingers, and took refuge in the soothing matter-of-factness of breakfast and Hitty's presence.

However, the ghosts were by no means laid; and as the meal came to an end and Roger rose to go, the earlier subject thrust itself wilfully back again.

"About the picnic," said Cicely, without meeting his eyes. "Have you changed your mind?"

"I can't, dear," said Roger. "I wish I could."

"Then," said Cicely, "I suppose I must go alone. Don't expect me to luncheon; I shall be gone all day."

Roger turned anxiously to face her. "I'd rather you wouldn't, Cicely!" he said. "I don't want you wandering in these woods alone. At this time of year, when the tramps are going to the cities, they are full of all sorts of rowdies."

"Then we shall be in equally good company!" retorted Cicely. "If you prefer janitors to me, I prefer tramps to you. I'm going."

Roger stiffened his shoulders. "Cicely," he said, "I ask you not to; is that enough?"

"No, it is not!" said Cicely. "I asked you not to go to your janitors."

The pallor came back to Roger's face, and his eyes looked steely. "Then," he said, "I forbid you to go. You drive me to it, Cicely." And without another word, without a thought of the good-bye kiss, he strode out of the room and out of the little house.

Cicely listened to his firm step as it tramped out of hearing, and her cheeks burned like coals. "He forbids me!" she said aloud; and, rising swiftly, she went to the kitchen door. "Hitty," she commanded in a clear voice, "please put me up a lunch as quickly as possible. I am going on a picnic."

§

When Cicely hurried from the house and down the village street, her eyes were still blazing, and her hands clenched: an angry refrain marched round and round in her heart,— "He prefers those ruffians to me . . . I asked him not to go, and he went . . . He forbade me; I'd go if it killed me . . ." But soon, steadily and subtly, the magic of the day began to work on her mood; first the refrain grew slower, then became intermittent, then ceased. She breathed the soft air deeply, and looked about at the radiant world. "What a waste of time, to be angry now!" she told herself. "I can be angry when I go home. Now I'm out of bounds; I'll be gay; I *will* be gay! Time enough for the other things later." And with the concentration of will which her creed of

living for pleasure had taught her, she pushed her depression determinedly away, and spurred herself into the spirit of the morning.

The woods awaited her in an enchantment of golden silence that set her instantly in another world. Underfoot the autumn carpet rustled crisply, and gave forth a pungent smell; now and then, across the sun-flooded air, a yellow leaf fluttered lightly; and in an evergreen thicket a lingering gypsy of a thrush, braving future danger for present joy, was singing rapturously. Cicely had never wandered alone in the woods in all her well-chaperoned, conventional life; the space, the silence and mystery, intoxicated her. "I'm free!" she cried aloud. "I'm free! and I'll be wild, wild!" and suddenly, coming to a long open glade of pine-trees, she dropped her little basket, flung out a singing cry like a Valkyr, and began to run.

Now her blood was leaping, and she had no need to urge herself into excitement. She ran at a speed she had not known she possessed, throwing back her head and letting her hair blow wild; and at the end of the long avenue she flung herself on the pine-carpet, panting and glowing. "I'm free!" she told herself again and again. "How glorious to be free,— how glorious!"

As she lay resting, her ear was suddenly caught by the clear, sharp call of another free wood-creature,— "Bob-White! Bob-White! Bob-White!" She sat up and listened; and the quail called again,— "Bob-White! Bob-White!"— very near, crisp and insistent. Cicely, charmed, sprang up, determined to follow the pretty

sound. After one or two false casts, she heard it plainly in a little dell, walled by thick branches, at her right. She held her breath, and stole softly towards it. It repeated itself, clear and mellow; she crept closer and closer, until it seemed at her very elbow; and at last, parting the branches, she peered eagerly into the dell, to see — the dark-haired boy of the President's Reception, sitting with his fingers at his mouth, whistling clearly and perfectly the quail's call, and laughing at her.

For a moment they gazed at each other,—Cicely staring in blank amazement, the boy returning her look with dancing brown eyes, and Bob-Whiting softly and steadily. Then Cicely began to laugh; and he, enchanted with his success, and bursting with mirth over his excellent joke, began to laugh too, dropping his fingers and shouting whole-heartedly. The more one laughed, the more the other did; they laughed until the inclosure rang and their eyes were wet; they were like two children, overcome by each other's mirth, and by delight in their own foolishness.

“Well, Great God Pan!” gasped Cicely at last, dropping down on the ground. “This is nice behaviour! What were you trying to do, with your wicked deceitful piping?”

“I was catching wood-nymphs!” said the boy, with a last dying giggle. “I baited my trap well, didn't I? I never expected to get such a good specimen, though; I believe I'll have you stuffed, and give you to the Smithsonian Institute.”

“I believe you won't!” retorted Cicely. “If there's

any stuffing done, I'll be the one to do it. Pans are rarer than nymphs any day. Besides, you haven't caught me yet."

"Haven't I, though!" said the boy. "I've lured you inside my magic circle, and now you're powerless to escape. Try it and see."

"Very well, then, I will!" cried Cicely. "Good-bye!" and jumping up on the instant, she dodged nimbly through a crevice between the trees.

The boy was on his feet as soon as she, and, slipping through another cranny, headed her off and drove her back again into the dell. Laughing, she ran from one opening to another, but he was always before her on the other side, beating her back with a feathery pine-needle switch; and at last, fairly vanquished, she gave in and dropped again on the ground, laughing breathlessly.

"There, you see!" said the boy, returning triumphant. "You might as well try to disobey the law of gravitation. You're my subject, do you hear me? and I'm boss in this place."

"I'm not your subject!" retorted Cicely. "I'm a republican nymph, with no ruler but myself!"

"Treason! treason!" cried the boy. "You can't fool me with that kind of talk. I know you: your name is Sylvia; you live in a birch-tree; and you have a red squirrel for your chaperon and housemaid. You see I've got your number."

"Oh, very well!" said Cicely. "Then I'll give you *your* statistics. Your name is Pan,— you live in an ash-pan,— you eat out of a dish-pan,— and you spend your time in raising — pandemonium."

The boy covered his ears with a face of horror. "Who'd have believed it!" he cried. "Such thoughts behind such features! I see I diagnosed you wrong after all; you're not Sylvia, you're nothing but your own squirrel; you're a punster and a criminal; and your name is Nuts."

Cicely gathered herself into a begging posture and wrinkled her nose at him; and indeed she looked not unlike a mischievous squirrel, with her fur toque and coat, and her merry eyes. "Proud, I'm sure!" said she. "And I got you wrong, too; you're no relation to the great god Pan; you're just his hanger-on and henchman, named — named, sir — Pancakes!"

With that they burst out laughing again, borne away on another delicious gale of youth and silliness. Extraordinary how easy it was to laugh, in this clear air and this free wilderness! Cicely felt like a bird, lifted out of every-day trammels and frets, swimming gloriously among the gay breezes.

When this new paroxysm was over, and they sat in that luxurious passivity which follows abundant laughter, the boy leaned forward and addressed Cicely confidentially. "Some time ago, when you first appeared on this scene, Nuts," he said, "I think you let fall an observation about your intention of stuffing me."

"You were the one who introduced the subject," said Cicely. "I only followed your lead, as any polite squirrel would,— you appearing to think yourself my superior."

"Yes, but I spoke figuratively," said he; "and I thought I saw a literal sort of glint in *your* eye. That,

coupled with your reference to pancakes, made me hope that you knew where they kept the refreshments. My inner Pan begins to think it's lunch-time."

"Greedy thing!" said Cicely. "At this hour of the day! That shows how much of a god you are. Get to work and dig some roots, then; that's what they live on in the woods,— roots and herbs."

"Those may do for swineherds, but not for near-gods like me, or squirrels like you," said the boy. "No; I was thinking, Nuts, that if I could be sure you wouldn't frisk into your hollow tree, I'd hie me to the purlieus of yon town and seek the wandering peanut-vender. I didn't have much breakfast, and I'd like to begin on that stuffing process,— no time like the present. But all the same, if there's any danger of your taking to the tall timber I'll starve before I stir from this spot."

"Well, now that you put it so reasonably," said Cicely reflectively, "I didn't have much breakfast myself, and I do seem to remember that I've got a winter store of nuts somewhere around these woods. Now where did I — Oh yes, I know! at the other end of the long pine path."

"I'll beat you to it," stated the boy succinctly; and he sprang to his feet and held back the branches for her to pass.

As they stood side by side in the glade the long vista tempted them, as it had tempted Cicely before, and on a common impulse they began to run. They looked at each other with dancing eyes of challenge; the breeze whistled blithely past their ears, and they sped faster and faster, racing. The delicious intoxication of speed

was upon them in a flash. Cicely's hat blew off; the boy lost his cap; they strewed the way with a miscellaneous trail of hairpins, handkerchiefs and pencils; but nothing mattered. When Cicely's breath began to fail and her feet to stumble, the boy caught her hand and pulled her along; and at last they reached the end of the path side by side as they had begun, and drew up, panting and laughing.

"Neck and neck!" cried the boy. "I'll tell you what, Nuts, you can set the pace for the other squirrels! But that was going some, even for you, wasn't it?"

"Oh, Pancakes, don't talk to me!" panted Cicely, leaning against a tree. "Oh, where *is* my breath?"

"I think you left it about half-way back, along with the other plunder," said he. "Don't frisk away while I go for it." He started off at a trot, looking back admiringly at her flushed face, tumbling hair, and parted breathless lips.

"I shan't move from this spot — for fifty-five years," gasped Cicely, sitting down. "You'll find me — all right — when you come back."

"Yes, I'll find you, all right!" said the boy, beneath his breath. "I won't lose you again." He ran off, waving his hand and gazing at her over his shoulder.

When he returned, Cicely had patted herself into some sort of order, and was settled snugly against the tree, deliciously tired. She received the spoils that the boy brought her with gratitude, and in return pointed out to him the wicker lunch-basket, still reposing unmolested in a thicket. His face of exuberant pleasure fell at the sight.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed. "I can't eat up *your* rations! I thought you really meant you had seen nut-trees. You eat this, and I'll go and forage."

"What a goose you are, Pancakes!" said Cicely. "There's enough food there for ten strong men. Don't make me argue, when I haven't got my breath!"

"Yes, but you need this, Nuts," protested the boy. "I'm not going to snatch food from the mouths of helpless squirrels."

"Stop talking, and open that basket!" commanded Cicely. "Do you want me to kill myself trying to eat all that lunch alone? I'll get the other republican squirrels together and impeach you, if you behave like a tyrant."

Thus threatened, the boy relinquished his scruples, got the lunch-basket, and sat down cross-legged to open it. At sight of what was revealed he gave a whoop of ecstasy.

"Oh, my pipes!" he cried. "Oh, look at this! Lettuce sandwiches! Cheese sandwiches! Nut sandwiches! Cold chicken! Paté-de-what-d'ye-call-it! O Pan, old tooter, this is a happy day for you!"

Cicely was hardly less elated. She sat up straight and clapped her hands, her breath suddenly restored. "Oh, how hungry I am!" she exclaimed. "Light the little lamp, quick, and heat the chocolate. Aren't there any olives? Isn't there any chocolate cake? Let me unpack it, Pancakes,—you're so slow! Oh, I could eat the hinges!"

Greedy and gay, they settled down to their meal in wild spirits. Cicely ate with the fork, the boy with the knife; she drank from the cup, and he from the little

sauce-pan; they took turns stirring with the one spoon. They laughed so much that the real squirrels in the trees eyed them askance, and scolded querulously; and then they laughed again, and imitated the squirrels' cross "chitching"; and so on until they reached the bottom of the basket and the end of the crumbs. There never was such a rollicking picnic in all the history of hampers.

"Oh, what a bully time!" said the boy, as they finished. "Race you down to the brook, Nuts!"

But Cicely, with the retirement of the basket from the stage, fell all at once into the grip of one of those abrupt changes of mood which so quickly altered the face of the world for her. It was afternoon now; she was tired; she was sick of laughter and folly; and suddenly she wanted nothing but home and Roger.

"I'm going home!" she said. "I don't want to stay here any longer."

"Oh, Nuts!" he cried. "When we're having such a lark! Why, you *can't* go; it's absurd. Come, let's play hide-and-seek; I'll be It."

"No, no," said Cicely impatiently. "I'm going."

He began to coax her charmingly; he was quite as charming as she, and almost as accustomed to having his own way. "Please, please! Just a little while! Oh, Nuts, you *can't* go yet. I've got *millions* of things in this wood to show you. There's a waterfall in the brook; and I know where there's a coon's nest,—I do, truly; and there's a hollow tree over by the dell where I found four baby squirrels last spring. Oh, don't go, Nuts! This is the best day I ever had in my life."

At all his pleading Cicely shook an impatient head.

She had no thought now for anything but Roger, and his strong arms, and his big comfortable shoulder; she would run to him, and they would forget the quarrels, and all would be happiness again. She started up and began to gather her belongings.

"Well, if we must go, we must," said the boy, yielding reluctantly at sight of her determination; "but we can't go till we pack the basket, and we can't pack till we wash up. Come on, let's take the things to the brook." He coaxed her again, trying to gain what time he could to prolong the happy hour.

But Cicely was not to be seduced. "You take them," she said; "I'm too tired." And as soon as, with unconcealed reluctance, he had obeyed, she began to slip stealthily away, looking over her shoulder to make sure he did not see her. She had finished with the boy now, she was tired of him; she wanted only Roger.

She had nearly reached the road, and, safely out of sight, was hurrying at a pace that was almost a run, when suddenly her foot caught on some obstruction in the path, and she stumbled forward. With a sharp exclamation she caught at a tree to save herself; and as she did so the obstruction, which she had supposed to be a root, moved, and displayed itself as a pair of legs incased in very dirty trousers. At the same instant an unkempt head, with a red, bristled face and sleepy eyes, peered round the tree, muttering, "What'n hell's this? Whadyer mean,— hey?"

Cicely's heart jumped uncomfortably. "It's one of those tramps!" she thought. "What a horrible creature! Why didn't I listen to Roger?" But, putting on

a bold front, she faced the man squarely. "I beg pardon for disturbing you," she said. "Let me pass, please."

At sound of her voice the man looked up, and his scowl gave way to a silly leer. He scrambled unsteadily to his feet. The marks of liquor were plain upon him, in his lurching movements and fetid breath.

"Granted, granted," he said affably, reaching towards her with a dirty hand. "Always willin' t' grant pardon t' a pretty pippin like you. Gimme a kiss, 'n' we'll say no more about it."

Cicely drew herself up. "Let me pass, please," she repeated. "You're in my path."

"Thass right," agreed the man, planting himself firmly in front of her. "I'm in your path, 'n' I'm goin' stay there. You're a peach. Gimme a kiss." He lunged at her with arms outstretched, and now his eyes were inflamed and lustful.

Fear clutched at Cicely's throat. Lurching-drunk as the man was, he was big and burly; her strength would be nothing against him. She stood her ground for an instant more, but, as he lunged again, her courage gave way, and she turned with a little cry and ran back into the wood.

The man, cursing her furiously, rushed after her. She was swift and frightened, but he was angry, and the motion through the clear air steadied him. In a moment he was close behind her, catching at her arm. Instinct made her wise, and she dodged behind a tree; but though for the instant he was at a loss, as soon as she began to run again he was after her. This time he clutched her

shoulders, swearing half in rage and half in triumph: she shrugged swiftly out of her coat, and, leaving it in his hands, darted away. But now her heart was labouring as if it would burst, her lungs too were bursting, and her feet faltered under her. She was at the end of her strength. "O Roger, Roger!" she cried despairingly.

"What's that?" called a cheery voice. "Where are you hiding, Nuts?"

"Here! Oh, come, Boy, come!" screamed Cicely. "Help me!"

With a startled exclamation and a crashing of bushes the boy came running. "I'm coming!" he shouted. "Hold on, Nuts! I'm with you!" and almost upon the words he was there, bursting through the underbrush like a moose. At sight of his fiery young face, the tramp wavered, stopped, and then,—true to the code of the bully tribe,—turned tail with a yell and made off through the woods: and Cicely, with a little piteous cry, crumpled to the ground in a heap.

The boy dropped on his knees beside her, his heart swelling fiercely with rage and pity. "I'd like to kill the brute!" he said, breathing hard. "Poor, poor little girl!"

"I'm not going to faint," Cicely murmured determinedly: and then suddenly, "O Boy, help me not to faint!" she cried, and flung out her hands to him.

He caught the cold little hands, and the touch of them took him suddenly out of himself. He kissed the hands first, and then, as she swayed towards him, he caught her in his arms and kissed her hair and her smooth cheek. The touch of his lips stung her back to con-

sciousness; she drew away from him, and struggled to her feet. He rose too, catching his breath. They stood gazing at each other, startled and shamefaced.

"I must go home," said Cicely brokenly. "Why did I ever come? Oh — Boy —"

"I'm a blackguard!" said the boy. "I don't know what made me do it. Please, please forgive me! I'll never do it again — until you give me permission."

Cicely heard him dimly, as if from a distance or through the sound of water. The pretty play had ended, and it was time now to pay the piper and face the facts. But she had no eyes for the false situation, or for the boy standing there and falling in love with her as fast as hot-foot youth could fall. She was too weary in mind and body to do anything but long for Roger. "I must go home," she kept saying in a whisper.

The boy looked at her, adoring and ashamed. "Yes, you must go home," he agreed. "But I think — I think you can't go that way. Your — your dress is torn. Where is your coat?"

"The tramp took it," said Cicely dully. She looked down, and there on her breast was a jagged rent in the sheer fabric of her blouse, where the rose-white flesh showed smoothly swelling. At sight of it the tears welled into her eyes, and she began to cry softly and wearily, like a child who has been hurt too much to bear anything more. "I must go home," she wailed softly, "and I can't go — I can't go this way. What shall I do? Oh me!"

"I'll fix it," said the boy quietly. He took from under his coat a little pin, oddly shaped and enamelled with

a cryptic emblem. "May I pin it with this?" he asked; and, Cicely nodding mutely with the tears running down, he caught the torn edges together and made them fast. His fingers trembled when they touched the warm flesh, but he did the work without bungling. Then, breathing rather fast, he wiped her cheeks with his handkerchief, and turned her gently so that she faced the road. "There, little girl," he said, "now you can go home."

Silently they went through the path to the street, Cicely walking unsteadily before. Now and then she gave a stifled sob, and at that the boy bit his lip, but neither one stopped or spoke. At the edge of the town he secured a carriage and put her into it, saying good-bye to her soberly; she, still dumb, gave him her cold hand. So they parted, the boy tramping down the street in a delicious turmoil of joy and pain, thrilled to the finger-tips, gloriously stirred; and Cicely cowering in the slow-moving carriage, spent and miserable. As for the little wicker lunch-basket, it was abandoned in the woods, with the rest of that day's gaiety.

§

Roger had waited and watched for Cicely since he came home at noon, growing more alarmed with each passing minute. He could not work, but tramped back and forth through the little house in a torment of suspense, picturing her in all sorts of straits,—lost; terrified; hurt and unhelped; kidnapped. At last he could stand it no longer, and had seized his cap and stick to

go and hunt for her, when her carriage rattled down the little street and stopped at the door.

At sight of her, coming up the path alive and well, the inevitable reaction set sharply in. Cicely's conventional training had come to her aid when she began to meet the curious looks of the townsfolk, and had spurred her into self-command; she had dried her eyes and straightened her hat, and recaptured something of her usual air of trig daintiness. Seen from the window, she was her own debonair self; and all the flood of anxiety pent up within Roger turned to indignation against its careless cause, who had been gaily enjoying herself without a thought of how she tortured him. He went to open the door for her, but his face was stern and cold, and he did not smile as he greeted her.

As for Cicely, at the moment of meeting she too suffered a harsh reaction. She had thought so much and so longingly of Roger's welcoming arms that this reception struck her like a blow in the face. Her heart contracted sharply. But pride lashed her into coldness; she stiffened her trembling lips, and looked at him with eyes as bright as ice.

"Well, I went to the picnic!" she said.

"So I see," said Roger. "You appear to have enjoyed it."

"Of course!" said Cicely defiantly.

"I suppose, then," said Roger, bitter and miserable, "since my wishes have no weight with you, and you amuse yourself so well away from me, you will take your pleasures in the future regardless of me."

"Yes, I probably shall," said Cicely, "since you ar-

range yours in the same way. And now, if you will kindly excuse me, I will go to my room and refresh myself."

"I hardly see why you should need refreshment, after such an agreeable day," said Roger, and his eyes travelled coldly over her tired beauty and tumbled raiment. Suddenly they focussed on the little pin on her breast. "Where did you get that pin?" he asked sharply.

Cicely's little inner devil jumped as at the flick of a whip. She had forgotten both the pin and the boy in this far greater concern of Roger's anger and her own wretchedness, but the fierce note of authority in his voice made her white-hot in an instant. "Is that any affair of yours?" she flashed.

Roger flushed dark red, and the veins in his temples swelled and stood out. "It's this affair," he said thickly,—"that the man who has a pin like that is pledged not to give it to any but the woman he loves; and you happen to be my wife."

Cicely's heart gave a convulsive leap, as if it had turned over and lain down again. She hardly knew whether this could be her quiet husband, this man with the face of fierce, primeval passion and the savage eyes. She felt terrified; and yet mingled with the terror was a strange, secret delight that she could move him so.

"He didn't give it to me," she said hurriedly. "A tramp ran after me and tore my blouse, and this boy (I don't know his name), fastened it with his pin so that I could come home. That's all."

Roger looked at her for a minute, with narrowed eye-

lids and a spark glinting between them. "A tramp tore your dress, and a boy whose name you don't know fastened it with his fraternity pin," he said at last, hoarsely. "So that's all! It's enough, Cicely." He swallowed hard, and his big hands clenched and unclenched; then, turning sharply, he walked into his study and flung the door shut.

Cicely stood gasping where he had left her. Once she made a movement towards the door, and then drew violently back again. At last, lifting her head high, she marched up the stairs to her room, went to the door that connected it with Roger's, locked it, and flung the key from the window out into the garden shrubbery.

They did not meet again that day. It grew dark, and Hitty prepared an unregarded dinner, and cleared it away again; and Roger tramped up and down behind the shut door of the study; and Cicely sat staring out of her window and thinking that the end of the world had come. And night fell.

VI

ARCADY MISLAID

THE end of the world had not come, however. It seldom does. Even though the seismic rumblings under the little House of Ford ought to have shaken the whole firmament, days and nights continued to follow each other on scheduled time, clothes had to be put on and off, meals eaten, and words of some sort spoken. Roger and Cicely, face to face with the inexorableness of every-day, were cowed into submission. They made peace with brief speeches of formal regret; and life went on.

Such a dreary life! No more stolen kisses behind the door in the hall, with guests waiting just inside the drawing-room; no more bursts of high spirits when Cicely gave imitations of Professor Roger on the lecture platform, and Roger disciplined her by putting her into the waste-basket; no more precious secrets whispered close and still, arms entwined, hearts beating together. "Badger" and "Pixie" were gone, and all the little army of pet-names, dear and intimate. They sat rigid in each other's presence, talking constrainedly of impersonal things, and thinking, each in his own heart, of the unforgettable wounds the other had dealt.

The game in these days was a defensive one. Each was well aware of imminent danger, and each played cautiously to safeguard what he still possessed, not dar-

ing the risk of a bold move to recapture the greater lost happiness. They were afraid of each other now, these two. How long an age it seemed from the day when they marched blithely hand in hand into their rosy playground, expecting Paradise to bloom uninterrupted about them forevermore, to this time of lurking dangers, bruises, and furtive, mistrustful glances! And there is nobody to teach the rules, and before a heavy-hearted player finds them out for himself, the game may be lost for good and all.

§

"Roger," said Cicely, one morning as he was leaving for college, "we haven't any engagement for to-night. You might invite some boys to dinner."

Roger understood, though she spoke carelessly. An evening alone was a dangerous thing, to be avoided at all hazards. "All right," he said, "any particular kind?"

"Any nice kind," said Cicely. "Any six in the whole university, provided they know an oyster-fork from a pitchfork."

Roger flushed a little, but let it lie; he was always the more cautious one in avoiding the danger-points. "I'll produce them," he said. "Seven o'clock, I suppose. Can Hitty get the dinner? — not that it matters!" he added hastily,— it was astonishing how many subjects had to be dodged in these days. "Trust me to deliver the goods. Good-bye, Cicely."

Cicely, with the mingled pang of relief and desolation which his departure always gave her nowadays, turned listlessly to the kitchen and Hitty. She had

learned to encourage her handmaiden's robust conversational powers, finding them one means of fending off the solitude she dreaded; and between the two had grown up a curious friendship, based on a substratum of attraction, and flavoured by the amused astonishment with which (each privately thinking the other a little insane), they regarded one another. Hitty, turning from her dish-washing, gave her mistress a cheerful welcome, and instantly loosed the dogs of conversation upon her.

"I ben havin' a little crack with the milkman," she said. "I ast him if he ben givin' his cows sea-water to drink, to make the milk s' blue; an' he said my tongue was enough to turn the cream to cheese, an' make it s' strong it c'd walk off by itself; an' I told him I guessed if it c'd stand goin' round half the mornin' on the same wagon with his face it c'd stand most anythin' it'd meet in *this* house. I do' know what's got into that coot, to make him s' tonguy."

"I hope you didn't alienate him completely," said Cicely, "because we're going to have six people to dinner to-night."

"Ye don't say!" exclaimed Hitty, looking alarmed. "I hope to my dyin' breath, Mis' Ford, ye ain't goin' to hev that craterer here again! I ain't got done yet burnin' up all them crates he brought his victuals in,— an' I don't want him clutterin' round under foot, anyway."

"Don't worry," said Cicely dryly, "I'm not likely to have him again. I thought perhaps you and the laundress could manage together,— there aren't going to be any ladies, just young men from the college."

"Manage! I sh'd think we could!" said Hitty, relieved. "I ain't much on 'lobster tumbles' an' 'chicken canopies,' but what I do' know about feedin' boys ain't wuth knowin'. You leave 'em to me; I'll stuff 'em like pigs for markit."

"Good," said Cicely. "You're used to feeding boys, are you, Hitty?"

"Land, yes!" said Hitty. "Down home on the farm we used to hev eight of 'em reg'lar,— fam'ly an' hands, — an' durin' hayin' time an' Thanksgivin' it'd 'a' taken a professor o' 'rithmetic to count 'em. We hed collige boys, too; my cousin Al, he went down to Orono to the State collige, an' he used to bring his friends home somethin' awful. I jest wish't you c'd 'a' seen the style them fellers put on! Dressy ain't no word for it."

"Tell me about them," encouraged Cicely. "Dressy, were they?"

"My good grief, yes!" responded Hitty, launching out impressively. "I seen the collige boys here, an' I want to tell ye they ain't in the class with Ally's friends for style. Why, they'd wear purple satin neckties, or red satin ones, every day; an' one of 'em hed a green one with blue spots as big as yeller-eye beans (han'somest thing you ever seen), that he'd flumox round in as common as dirt. An' these stylish collars, cut low-neck in front, with points stickin' out sideways,— this feller hed 'em so low an' so big-pointed he looked jest like a boat sailin' wing-an'-wing, with his Adam's apple gobblin' up an' down in the middle. An' clo'es! Land, they'd wear fancy fifteen-dollar suits, with great big tasty

checks and turnin'-back cuffs an' buttons all over, jest as if they was nothin' at all."

"They must have been the latest Hint from Paris," remarked Cicely. "Was your cousin as fashionable as the rest?"

"Not right off, he wa'n't," admitted Hitty; "but when he'd ben there two months, he could give points to any of 'em. I'll never forgit when he bust out in a dress-suit. He was goin' to a dancin' party, an' he wanted to go in style, so he took nineteen dollars o' his hayin'-money an' bought him the han'somest dress-suit money c'd buy,—fancy-cut, an' lined all through the coat with cotton-back satin you c'd see yore face in. He come home an' tried it on t' show the family, an' then he was so tickled with himself that nothin' 'd do but he must go over t' his Uncle Hiram's house (uncle on his father's side), an' show his gran'mother. 'Look a-here, Grammy!' he says. 'What d'ye think o' this?' 'My soul an' body!' s' she. 'What happened t' yore coat, Ally? Did the south-paster bull gore ye? The front's all tore off!' she says. 'Shucks, Grammy!' says Ally, 'that's the style. It's evenin' dress,' s' he. 'Evenin' dress, hey!' says Grammy, disgusted. 'Well, I'd ruther a good old-fashioned nightshirt any day!' she says. That was all the praise he got out o' *her*; an' then goin' home he walked by the road so's to show off, an' Turner's little boys throwed mud at him, an' old Mis' Rutherford took him for an arnachist an' set the dog on him. An' then at the party, the black all run out o' the linin' s' bad he hed to scour himself with sand-soap. But he said 'twas wuth standin' a few adversities for; an' after

all, I don't s'pose Solomon himself felt real comfterble when he was fixed up in his tastiest duds. What kind o' soup'll we hev, Mis' Ford?"

At this leisurely pace the discussion of the dinner consumed an hour; and when that was done, there were tradesmen to be telephoned to, flowers to be ordered and arranged, and silver to be laid out. Roger returned to find a busy, animated wife, moving briskly about the house and talking quite gaily of her plans. His own spirits leaped up in instant response. It was something like the old days, before the Reign of Terror. At luncheon, having a subject that was not fraught with danger, they talked freely; Roger told of his good fortune in meeting and securing the six leading seniors as they were coming from the meeting of the Student Council, and Cicely recounted her menu and some of Hitty's locutions. They parted cheerfully, and Roger consumed a deal of precious time hunting through the local florists' shops for a spray of trailing arbutus (the flower which always seemed to him to embody Cicely's quality of wayward sweetness), for her to wear that night in her hair.

Therefore, in spite of its untoward antecedents, this entertainment began more favourably than any they had yet projected. Cicely was glad to be doing something, Roger was glad in her pleasure; they were mutually desirous of success, and drawn together once more by a common interest. Roger, soberly handsome in his evening clothes, looked on Cicely, as she came down the stairs (like a rosebud, delicate pink-and-white from the trailing spray in her hair to the bows on her satin slippers),

with love and longing; and she, reading his eyes, told herself with a suddenly leaping heart that as soon as the sun rose she would creep out into the garden, and find the lost key.

There was no time, however, for the word and the kiss that might have made all things right again. Hitty was hovering uneasily, waiting for certain nice distinctions between forks to be elucidated once more; and then the bell rang, and Roger, after his hearty hospitable habit (which Cicely disapproved of, and Hitty tacitly encouraged), went himself to open the door; and while he was still in the hall with the first guest, another came, and another; so that hearts must disappear decorously, and only good manners be visible. Roger piloted the guests to the drawing-room a little reluctantly, secretly longing to keep his wife to himself; yet happy, too, in ministering to her enjoyment.

"Cicely, this is Mr. Saunders, our prize debater," he said,—"and Mr. Hutchins, leader of the glee club,—and Mr. Fulton, editor-in-chief of the 'News.' Fellows, I have the honour of presenting you to my wife."

Cicely came forward, hand outstretched, face alight. "Why, how nice!" she said. "I've met you all before,—at the President's Reception,—do you remember?"

The boys,—all clean-cut, fine-looking youngsters,—hurried in a body to receive her greeting.

"Do we remember?" exclaimed young Hutchins. "Why, we've been talking about it ever since. We've been standing on our heads trying to find out who you were. But we went at it wrong; we thought you were

— that is, we supposed you weren't — well, you see, we didn't have any idea —"

"I get you, my boy!" said Roger, laughing and clapping him on the shoulder. "You didn't know she was shackled in matrimony, eh? Well, that's where I had the advantage of you,— I've known it for six months." He went off, chuckling merrily, to open the door to another arrival.

"Why," said Cicely, so artlessly that they all laughed, "I should think *anybody* could see I was married!"

"Well, you see," said young Hutchins, "you don't look exactly — exactly —"

"Downtrodden!" said the debater.

"Or — or middle-aged!" ventured the editor-in-chief.

"Well, but," said Cicely, wrinkling her brows, "don't I look *matronly*?"

At this they all shouted with laughter; indeed at that moment, in her rosebud daintiness, she looked hardly more than a child. But Cicely remained serious and puzzled. She herself had been so intensely aware of her matronhood that she had supposed it stamped upon her in raised letters for all to read; it had never occurred to her that any one could miss it.

While the boys were still laughing, Roger reappeared with the captain of the crew,— a magnificent young giant,— and a jolly little roly-poly who was president of the dramatic club. They too proved to be known to Cicely, and their greetings of her were fervent. Roger, noting with keen pleasure the guests' common attitude of worshipful admiration, beamed on them.

"What a galaxy of campus lights!" he said. "It would make any freshman's eyes pop out. But where's Maddox?"

"He was comin' with me," said the jolly little plump boy, Bowles, "but I got tired waitin' for him. Spivvy's always late; he'd make a good messenger-boy."

"If he knew who he was going to see he'd be early enough!" said Hutchins to Cicely. "He's the one that's tried hardest of all to find out who you were."

"Hasn't he just!" joined in the editor. "Why, he wanted me to send reporters round to find out what families had girls visiting them; and he even held up the President and asked him if there was any new prof. in college with a grown-up daughter."

"Next thing," remarked little Bowles, "he'd have been puttin' an ad in the get-together column,—'Handsome young man of good family wants to connect with beautiful girl who juggled the Java at Prexy's feed'—oh, excuse *me*, Mrs. Ford!—I mean poured the coffee at the President's Reception. I get so used to consortin' with hoboes that I don't know how to talk in good society."

"Well, perhaps—" began Roger, but at that moment the bell rang again, and he hurried away to answer it.

"There he is!" said Cicely. "I'm quite curious to see him."

"He's worth seeing!" said the big crew captain, warmly. "Finest fellow that ever grew,—isn't he, fellows?"

"Cicely!" said Roger from the doorway. "Here's

the chief luminary of the senior class,— the president, Mr.—”

“ Why, Nuts! ” cried the dark boy; and darted from behind Roger to seize Cicely’s hand.

There was a moment’s startled pause. Cicely flushed hotly, Roger turned as violently pale; the boys exchanged amazed glances. The new arrival feasted his eyes on Cicely’s face, oblivious of the stir he was creating.

“ Well, well,” said Roger, collecting himself, and speaking in a hoarse voice that he meant to make cheery, “ here’s another meeting of old friends, it seems! ”

This loosed the boys’ tongues, and they began to assail their classmate unanimously.

“ Nuts yourself! ” said the crew captain indignantly. “ You’re the nutty one. This is Mrs. Ford.”

“ Yes, you old goat,” said Hutchins. “ What’s the matter with you? Nice way to behave in company! ”

“ You go put yourself in hock, Spivvy, till you can learn manners,” admonished Bowles severely. “ Mrs. Ford’ll take you for a fried egg.”

The dark boy looked from one to another, and then back to Cicely. His eyes besought her to say that these people were all wrong, and he and she the only ones who understood. But Cicely, alert to the danger in the air, had other concerns than allaying his anxiety; she was glancing rapidly about the room, gathering herself and the situation into hand for immediate action.

“ Don’t scold Mr. Maddox! ” she said lightly. “ He did me a service at a time when he had no chance to learn my name, and so he had to invent one for himself.

Now let's go in to dinner, shall we? — just helter-skelter, like this." She led the way as she spoke, and the guests were forced to follow without time for any more wonderment.

The pretty dining-room, all soft light and fragrance, promptly diverted their thoughts to other channels. Cicely juggled them cleverly, putting the most animated next to Roger, the less talkative by herself, and the boy who was the *crux* of the situation in the neutral zone at the middle. A burst of cheerful chatter was the immediate result; and by the time the soup had been served, the awkward moment was forgotten, and the entertainment well on its feet.

Cicely looked around her with a half-bewildered sense of a crisis averted. Even now the memory of her dealings with this boy was vague and misty; she had used him for her pleasure, as she used everything, and then had promptly forgotten him in the flood of unhappiness which followed. If he had entered her mind at all, it was only to be greeted resentfully as the cause of the last bitterness between her and Roger. Now she was hotly indignant at his reappearance; just when things had begun to be a little better, he must come and spoil it all with his silly antics! She had no intention of humouring him; he had made trouble enough. She kept her eyes determinedly away from him, and concentrated her will on making the evening a success.

No hostess could have had better support. These delightful boys all had the ease of excellent breeding; they were all personalities, the chosen leaders of the campus life; and, all but one, they were in exuberant spirits. As

Cicely's challenging, sparkling smile went the rounds of the table, it was met by a unanimous response of smiles and eager talk.

"My, we're glad we're here, Mrs. Ford," said the fluent Hutchins. "You don't know how good it seems, after eating day in and day out in Commons, with all the Great Unwashed, to come to a table with flowers and candles and a lady!"

Cicely gave him a gay little bow. "*Piacere il mio!*" she said. "Now, let's get acquainted. There are thousands of things I want to ask you; I don't know anything about American college life, and I want to know everything."

"Ask me, Mrs. Ford," entreated Hutchins. "I'm the only reliable stude here; the rest are buccaneers and brigands."

"Oh, yes!" jeered little Bowles. "That sounds well from a hardened rusticator like you! Take it from me, Mrs. Ford, that guy's an expert in more lines o' crime than anybody in the Rogues' Gallery. Now, if you want an honest man —"

"Ask me!" urged Wallace, the captain. "I've got all the statistics of this institution cold, from Prexy's age down to how much Felton grafts out of the "News" in a year. As a repository of useful facts, I've got the Farmers' Almanac beaten."

"No, no, Mrs. Ford, don't trust any of 'em!" said the debater, Saunders. "I'm the Only Original Fount of Truth. You couldn't match me from the rugged confines of the Atlantic to the sun-kissed slopes of the Pacific,—from the glittering pinnacles of the frozen North —"

"Oh, Lizzie!" groaned the plump boy, rolling up his eyes. He had the true comedian's quality; everything he said and did was touched with drollery, and even when he did nothing at all, his round solemn face and little turned-up nose were exquisitely funny.

"Well, I learned it out of Prexy's speech last week," said the orator defensively.

"I believe you," said Bowles, severely. "If there is a worse speaker in college than you, it's Prexy. Ought to know better than to crib from such a model,—oughtn't he, Mr. Ford?"

Roger smiled, sympathetically but discreetly. Cicely's carefully fostered atmosphere of frank comradeship had already allayed the sharp pang that the dark boy's arrival had cost him; seeing her gay and oblivious, and the boy silent and unregarded, he was fast regaining his serenity.

"I never talk before newspaper men," he said cheerfully, nodding towards Felton. "First law of self-preservation."

"That's right, too," approved Saunders. "The risk's too great. Many a reputation has been torn to shreds by that sad-eyed vulture feeding peacefully yonder."

Felton smiled good-naturedly as little Bowles poked him in the ribs. He was the only one of the group with no sign of the mental twinkle that almost universally distinguishes Young America,—an earnest, high-minded boy with eye-glasses and radical views, who beheld the fooling of his mates with tolerant indifference, and kept steadily along his own serious path.

"You ask about American college life, Mrs. Ford," he said. "I'll put it for you in a nutshell; I've thought

a great deal about it. American colleges are excellent pieces of machinery for grinding out graduates, like sausages, all nicely moulded and polished on the outside. But they have no ideals. We go into the machine as raw material, we get minced into a little different semblance, and we come out — just the same stuff that went in, just sausages. Where is the spiritual inspiration that ought to have made us over? Are these institutions doing their duty to the country, when they fail to provide the vital spark?"

"Hear, hear!" cried Hutchins. "Old Ink-pots is on the war-path!"

"Can you beat that, Sadie!" ejaculated Bowles, lifting his plump hands in a gesture of dismay. "Sausages! Handsome little things like us!"

"I've been watching this thing steadily, during the three and a half years I've been in college," continued the earnest Felton; "I've watched the men in my class, and the men that have gone out in my time. I see us marching through by the hundred, as good stuff, and as fit for accomplishment, as you could find anywhere in the world. And do you know how we turn out? Nine per cent. of us go into work that's for the good of our fellow-men, and the other ninety-one divide into two pursuits, money-making and trifling. What result do you call that for the time and money and brains that go into our education?"

"Oh, peanuts!" sighed little Bowles. "I shall never smile again. It's crook of you, Ink-pots."

"There's a great deal in what you say, Felton," said Roger soberly. "I think you go too fast; you can't

measure the results of a man's education by his first year out of college, or his fifth; but there's no doubt that with the majority the right kind of results never show. I think a great deal about it too. Ideals are the most important equipment a college can give,—and we all want to give them, else we ought never to have come into this work. But we don't. There's no denying it, we don't."

"*You do, Mr. Ford!*" said Felton, quickly. "It was seeing you, and the sort of inspiration you give to the fellows under you, that first put this idea into my head. You taught me in my freshman year, and I got more public spirit out of your science than I ever did out of anybody's civics or ethics. What I want to know is, why there aren't more profs like you."

Roger turned red with embarrassment and pleasure. "You're horsing me, Felton!" he said. "There isn't a man in this faculty who doesn't give more than I do. I'd like to give something, God knows!—but formulæ and experiments don't show me how. You got it out of yourself."

At this a chorus of protests arose from the other guests. They were not, they remarked, going to allow old Inkpots, who never evolved anything from his inner consciousness but groans, to get the credit for the "spiritual hunches" he had received from Roger. They all launched at once into encomiums on the quality of Roger's influence, young Hutchins avowing himself "bats on him from the kick-off," and little Bowles raising his hand to swear solemnly that he had become "a changed man" the moment he entered Roger's classroom. Through all

their humorous extravagance their warmly affectionate admiration showed clearly.

Cicely's eyes sparkled with pleasure at their tribute to her husband; but when she saw the earnest Felton about to return to his discourse, she changed the subject promptly. If these ideals they were talking about involved the treating of janitors as blood-brothers, she did not mean to countenance them; and if they were just vague abstractions about the welfare of the race, they were not worth bothering with. She was too young, too completely absorbed in her own problems, to project her sympathies beyond her immediate horizon. It is an accomplishment that comes slowly to women trained in selfishness.

"I want to know about the college play," she said briskly. "Who acts it, who writes it, and when does it happen?"

"Ah, you've come to the right place for that!" Hutchins told her. "Look at this majestic form beside me, in which Booth, Salvini and the Tragic Muse live again; he's the chap to tell you all about the mission of the stage. Speak up, Bolster."

The president of the dramatic association placed his hand on his heart, and bowed with grandeur. "You underrate me," he said to his neighbour, "but I'll pass that by. I had thought, Mrs. Ford, of givin' to the public a flippant trifle by a strugglin' quill-driver called Shakespeare, in which I was goin' to represent a melancholy Dane who's the livin' image of me; but the high-brows overruled me. Instead, we are goin' to produce the tragedy of 'Cheltenham Chops,' which was written by

our learned friend Professor Maddox, and in which he'll play the handsome hero, or I'll know the reason why. You can elucidate your 'draymer,' Spivvy; you're the one that gets real heartfelt satisfaction talkin' about it."

Cicely looked inevitably, for the first time, at the boy of her adventure, and as she did so she gave an imperceptible start. All this time, in her selfish preoccupation, she had never once thought of what the affair might have brought to him; and now his white, drawn face and eyes of bewildered suffering smote her with an almost physical pang. The resentment went out of her, and a rush of half-maternal sympathy took its place. He was, like herself, a spoiled child, hurt, and angrily astonished that pain should dare to come to him; she understood him instinctively, and knew what heat of indignant misery was burning in him. In a flash she had constituted herself his champion and protector.

"Mr. Maddox is too modest to tell his own glory," she said, turning back to Bowles, "and I'm too awe-struck to accost him. Playwright, hero,—what else is he? Manager? Heroine?"

"Not much!" said the other dramatic light, indignantly. "Spivvy is a great man, but I'm not goin' to see him hog the whole show. Tink Lambert is the manager, and the heroine—now couldn't you tell it at a glance? 'Tis I!"

"To think of that!" exclaimed Cicely. "President, playwright, hero and heroine at one and the same moment, all at my humble board! What is there left for me?"

"Nothin', Mrs. Ford," said the heroine impressively.

"You've reached the tipmost top. It is written, 'See Maddox and Bowles, and then die,'—only don't die before February sixth, or you'll miss the crownin' thrill. Tickets one dollar for adults, and fifty cents for infants, imbeciles and studes. Lovely ladies free, by invitation of the management." He bowed profoundly, and the others all thumped on the table in applause of his gallantry.

Roger, watching Cicely as she made her pretty gesture of acknowledgment, was happier than he had been for many a day. Cicely had seemed, in all this cloud of estrangement and pain, to be slipping away from him; but now the atmosphere of gaiety and good cheer brought her near again, and he felt as full of ecstatic hope as he had at the very beginning of their life together. His eyes were fastened on her face, and his heart was in them. So sweet a Cicely,—so full of precious promise! Surely, surely, now he would find and keep her.

She saw the look in his eyes, and, suddenly yearning to him almost as he did to her, pushed back her chair and rose. "Come, lordings!" she said. "I want to show my gratitude for your good company. This room is too little for spirits as great as ours." And, impetuous and light-footed, she hurried them off to the drawing-room again.

"No, no coffee!" she said, shaking her head as the neat-handed laundress approached her with the tray. "Somebody else pour it. I want to sing." She slipped into her place at the piano. It was true that the little dining-room had suddenly seemed too small for her; she was impelled to make music, to pour herself out to

Roger in the form of expression that was instinctive with her. For a moment her fingers strayed over the keys, seeking a melody that suited her mood; and then, softly, she began to sing. "Still wie die Nacht, tief wie das Meer—!" And as she sang, her voice, over the melting, flowing accompaniment, took on its strangely poignant quality of a tenderness almost tragic, a passionate sweet sincerity; she was singing with her heart, singing to Roger.

Her music laid a spell upon the room. The boys' effervescence passed, and an enthralled earnestness took its place; little by little the small sounds of restlessness ceased, and above a deep hush her lovely voice soared throbbing. As for Roger, he gave up at once his clumsy fumblings with the coffee-cups, and, with a great sigh of happiness, turned his head so that he could not see the others, and yielded himself to dreams. Apart from the wistful ecstasy which her singing always stirred in him, this song came freighted with messages. It was the song she had sung on the night after she had promised herself to him, when she could not let her eyes speak to him before all the curious eyes in her uncle's great rooms, but had spoken, even as now, in music: and afterwards, during that wonderful honeymoon in the gray castle by the French sea, she had sung it at his beseeching one night in the garden, with the old trees whispering above them, and the ocean crooning the obbligato that her hands,—held fast in his,—could not play. With his eyes closed he lived it over again,—that first evening, when among all the glitter and gaiety he and she alone

seemed real, she singing her heart out to him, he afire with wonder and delight: — and that later night in the old castle garden, the moonshine, the flower-fragrance, the faint salty breath of the sea, and Cicely's sweet body quivering within his arm with the stress of her singing. Precious, ineffable days! Now they were coming back again; they had only been lost for a little while.

The music ceased, and, at a sound of movement, Roger turned back again to reality. He was half-blind with dreams; he almost expected to see Cicely alone, as in the garden, faintly haloed with moonlight and starlight; or surrounded only by those thronging phantoms of Paris who had seemed less real than shadows. But instead, he found himself back in the little room that had been so dreary of late, shut away from Cicely by the boys who made up his daily life. And as his eyes sought eagerly to meet his wife's, they were suddenly cut off from their goal by the dark boy, Maddox, who darted across the room as if he had been hypnotised, and bent over Cicely to claim the smile that should have been his.

Roger turned his eyes away with a pang so fierce and sudden that it robbed him of his breath. For a moment he saw a red mist. His civilised over-mind talked to him sanely, saying that jealousy was savagery, that he was a Turk, a barbarian; that perfect love casteth out fear: but it was no use; something rudely, primitively masculine in him shouted denial. He clenched the arms of his chair until his fingers were white, fighting for self-mastery; and when, with difficulty, he had attained it, he went brusquely to the corner farthest away from the

piano, and flung himself into a rapid and disjointed conversation with the boys nearest him to keep from seeing Cicely.

Cicely, meantime, had set herself deliberately to the comforting of her friend. His pain-white face and tragic eyes oppressed her; and, now that she had made all things right between herself and Roger, she wished to see him happy too. Moreover, besides his own charm, which had reasserted itself swiftly and potently as soon as she gave it a chance, he had for her that nameless appeal (compact of pity, tenderness, and remorse), of a man for the woman who has made him love her. Unconsciously, — but inevitably, for she was all woman,— she wooed him to make him smile again.

“Oh, how you sing!” said the boy, spellbound. “How wonderful you are!”

“You like it?” asked Cicely, dimpling at him.

“Like it!” said the boy, with a long-drawn breath. “It’s as beautiful — as beautiful as you!”

“All that!” said Cicely, laughing. “Then I’ll do it again. What will you have?”

The boy named off-hand the songs of his choice,— old and dear songs, “Drink to me only with thine eyes,” “Loch Lomond,” “Bonny Doon,”— and stood by her, falling more deeply and recklessly in love with every moment, and every note of her sorrowful rich voice. She, coaxing him back to contentment, made him the centre of the group; if another asked for a song, she would not give it without the boy’s consent; and when he smiled, she looked triumphant, and nodded gaily towards Roger. She sang again and again, untiring as a bird.

"Oh, I am happy!" she thought. "My Badger and I love each other; and the Boy is smiling. Oh, what a lovely world! Soon, soon — when they go — I will slip into the garden and find the key: for we are lovers again."

At last,—reluctant, but obedient to their training,—the boys rose to depart. Cicely sped them gladly, with gay speeches in answer to their fervent gratitude. The room was alive again with merry chatter: "Good-bye, Mrs. Ford; I've had the *bulliest* time"—"Not a bit bullier than I have, Mr. Wallace!"—"Good-bye, Mrs. Ford; won't you please ask me again?" "Yes, if you'll promise to come soon!" "Good-bye, Mrs. Ford; now don't go forgettin' the play and the lovely leadin' lady, will you?"—"Indeed I never shall! I'll be there before the footlights are on, sitting in — what do you call it? — the baldhead row!"

The dark boy was the last to say farewell. His eyes, though still sombre, had absorbed a little of her smile, and he looked more like himself. He took her hand in silence, and something in his look of rapt devotion as he bent over her recalled mistily to Cicely the moment of their other farewell. She looked after him in some perplexity. There was something he had given her then,—something she ought to return to him — Oh yes, the pin! — the wicked little pin that had turned Roger into a brute. In her soreness and anger, she had thrust it out of her sight in a dark corner of an unused jewel-box, and had not allowed herself to think of it. Now she ran swiftly up the stairs, to get it and return it and have done with skeletons forever.

The boy had gone when she came down, and Roger

was in the drawing-room fastening the windows. Cicely crept to the outer door; perhaps she could still catch her friend; and then, her errand done, she would recapture the key and steal back again without Roger's being any the wiser. She meant to have no scene of reconciliation, that would involve too many damaging admissions: she would unlock the closed door; she would slip her hand into Roger's; and all would be right again.

Surely enough, the boy was lingering outside,—loath to leave the spot, looking in vain for Cicely's window. Cicely ran to him, holding out the pin.

“Boy!” she said softly. “Boy! Take this!”

He turned to her with a low exclamation and a transfigured face. “Oh, Nuts!” he said. “You're giving me something?”

“It's your pin,” said Cicely. “Take it, please.”

The colour rushed over his face so violently that Cicely could see it in the moonlight. “Oh, don't, don't!” he cried. “Oh, Nuts, please don't give it back! I can't bear it.”

“You must take it, quickly,” urged Cicely. “It's yours.”

“I can't,” said the boy brokenly, putting his hands behind him. “Nuts, you don't know what this is to me,—to-night, and — and finding you here, and — and who you are. You — you don't know what else I've been dreaming of giving you, all these days. But the pin — anyway, I've given *that* to you! nothing can undo that! If you won't keep it, throw it on the ground and let it lie; but I'll never take it again. O Nuts, don't make me! You'll break my heart if you do.”

Cicely looked uncertainly at the pin, as it lay in her outstretched hand. It seemed a little thing to yield, and a churlish one to refuse; and the boy's beseeching eyes were hard to resist.

He saw his advantage, and pressed it. "Please do this one thing for me!" he pleaded. "I'll never ask you to do another. It won't hurt you if you keep it, but it will kill me if you don't. Oh, please, please, please!"

"Well—" said Cicely slowly.

"Oh, thank you, Nuts!" cried the boy fervently. He seized her hand and crushed it until the pin bit the flesh; then, turning swiftly, he plunged away into the night.

Cicely looked after him with a sigh. He was very charming, and very pathetic. However, she had no time for sentiment with this more important errand awaiting her; and, shivering a little with cold and excitement, she soon withdrew her gaze from the boy's vanishing figure, and crept softly around the house to the little moonlit garden.

It was not a very difficult matter to find the key. If the truth were to be told, Cicely had slipped out more than once in these past miserable days to make sure that it still lay safely on the hard ground beneath the leafless rose-bushes, and each time she had pushed it a little farther out of its hiding-place. Perhaps, even while her own stubborn will refused to yield, she had secretly hoped that Roger,—more generous,—would perceive and answer its mute appeal. Now she saw it plainly, gleaming in the moonlight; and, catching it up gladly, ran with it to the little house.

Roger had missed her for some minutes, and had been

calling her anxiously. Now, telling himself that she was upstairs, and perhaps did not hear him,— and perhaps did not want to,— he was locking the door. She ran up the steps and pounded on it with her fists, crying gaily, “Let me into your cave, old Badger! Let me in!”

Roger started at the summons, and his face darkened. He was still gnawed by a jealousy he could not subdue; as he locked the front windows he had seen the boy lingering behind the rest, and while his pride and chivalry would not permit him to look out again, a hateful misgiving lurked in his mind. Now, when Cicely ran in cold and sparkling out of the night, with her hands tightly shut and her eyes shining, the savage instinct rose in him so powerfully that it mastered his determined self-repression.

“Where have you been, Cicely?” he asked, in that hoarse, passionate voice that was so new to him.

“Out-doors, to be sure!” said Cicely, hardly catching the note in this first instant of light and warmth. “Did you think this was a new way of coming up from the cellar?”

“What did you go out for?” asked Roger, grimly disregarding her flippancy.

This time Cicely was fully aware of his tone, and flamed in answer to it. “What right have you to ask me that?” she demanded.

“What right have you to force me to it?” retorted Roger. “And what is that in your hand?”

Cicely hesitated the fraction of a second. It would have been so easy, even now, to open the hand that held the key, and open Roger’s hungry arms as well: but

Cicely,— hot-hearted, flaming, uncontrolled,— could no more have done it than have made the sun stop blazing. She flung out the other hand, opening it; and there on the palm lay the little gleaming pin.

“The gift of a friend,” she said calmly.

“Ah!” said Roger hoarsely; and, not trusting himself to words, he tramped away from her up the stairs.

Cicely hesitated a minute, her eyes burning and her two hands clenched again. Then, reopening the door, she went to the brink of the back-porch steps, and, with a violent effort, threw the key as far as her strength could send it. This time she closed her eyes and turned away her head, to have no memory of where it fell.

VII

ANOTHER BLOW ON THE DIPLOMATIC WEDGE

THE winter had now closed in, and the chastened but continuous gaiety of the college world was in full swing. Cicely was besieged by invitations; her fame had grown steadily, and she was already so much of a personage as to be greatly in demand in a semi-official capacity,—assisting at receptions, chaperoning, after our quaint fashion, dancing-parties of young people anywhere from one to ten years her seniors, and being put on the list of "patronesses" for charity enterprises. She flitted feverishly from house to house, bored beyond measure by the constant activity, yet panic-stricken at the thought of a break in it. How should she, who had never had even a bowing acquaintance with her own soul, find courage to face and probe it now, in this first great crisis? She was afraid to sit still, afraid to think; life was confronting her with strange and grim problems, and she tried to evade them by burying her head, ostrich-like, in one trivial preoccupation after another.

Roger watched her with an aching heart and a stony face. He saw well enough that marriage had not brought her happiness, and as for himself, he too,—courageous of spirit though he was,—was afraid to plumb the depths of disappointment and misgiving within

him. As she plunged more and more violently into her social activities, he immersed himself deeper and deeper in work, and withdrew increasingly into the fastnesses of his natural reserve, separating his interests entirely from hers in a vain hope that freedom might bring her joy. They met only at meals, and talked like polite strangers.

Roger's withdrawal was the more easily effected, because claims of which Cicely knew nothing were pressing him hard. The debts, accumulating steadily, had mounted into a pyramid of appalling proportions; buying and furnishing the little house, and financing that care-free honeymoon by the French sea, had exhausted Roger's capital, and in his cheerful counting on his future salary he had reckoned without his wife's tastes and habits. Now, shackled by false chivalry, he could not teach her the plain truth and give her the chance to develop into a woman by sharing his problems: instead, he let her go headlong from one folly to another, while he wrestled with the results alone. His own small special pleasures (subscriptions to foreign periodicals, memberships in one or two clubs and three or four scientific societies, occasional indulgences in book-buying), had long since gone by the board; and now he relinquished his daily exercise, and the research work that was his intellectual delight and surety of professional success, and devoted every possible minute to the hated but lucrative drudgery of tutoring. What with worry and overwork and heartache, he was jaded almost to exhaustion; and his physical weariness intensified the cold impassivity of his bearing.

Cicely, incapable herself of passive endurance, saw him going farther and farther from her with anguished rebellion. In her, emotion was a fierce flame, which must either blaze or die; she was terrified by this barrier of reserve and silentness that gave no hint of what it hid. Though far too wilfully stubborn herself to yield an inch of her own ground, she began inevitably to fight to make him come forth from his; there must be some change, and Roger, clearly, must be the one to make it. Yet she dared not, at this strained moment, risk a direct attack; to lure him forth by strategy to some neutral ground would be, she thought, the only safe course.

"Come with me to the Miltons' reception, Roger!" she said one afternoon, entering the study in festal garb. "It's going to be a beautiful one."

"I can't," said Roger. "I have tutoring engagements till seven o'clock."

"This appetite of yours for work is getting overgrown," commented she. "Give it up for a while."

"I can't," repeated Roger briefly.

"I really think you might," insisted Cicely. "You've hardly taken time to-day to eat your meals."

"It's impossible, Cicely!" said Roger; and his over-driven feeling of fatigue, hurry and anxiety made him add sharply, "Please don't ask me again."

"Well, then," said Cicely, retreating in some alarm to another position, but determined not to give up her purpose, "I'll have to invite some people here. You're getting to be a perfect hermit. You ought to meet your fellow-men."

Roger groaned inwardly, but would not oppose her

more than he could avoid. "Very well," he said. "Do as you please; only I have to work now."

"Oh, good for you, Roger!" cried Cicely, clapping her hands. Her impetuous spirits rose with a leap; once they had a common interest again she was sure she could somehow contrive to draw him back to her. "I'll give an 'at home,' then,—let me see,—on the twenty-ninth of January; and I'll ask some of the Department wives to pour, and Clarissa to receive with me."

Roger lifted his head from his papers. "I wish you'd ask Mrs. Davidson instead," he said.

Cicely's mood veered suddenly. "I don't see why," she returned coldly.

"I've told you more than once," said Roger, looking at her.

"Clarissa's *much* more interesting," declared Cicely, with emphasis.

"Mrs. Davidson is a much better friend," said Roger firmly.

"What have you against Clarissa?" demanded Cicely, the ready flush rising to her cheeks.

Roger read the danger-signals, and tried to answer lightly. "Oh, well,—she calls you Cissy," he said. "That's more than any husband could stand."

"You needn't worry about that," said Cicely. "I get back at her; I call her Risky,—which is worse, and suits her into the bargain. So that's all right, and I'll ask her."

But on this point Roger was invincibly stubborn. "Ask Mrs. Davidson too, then," he said.

"It's impossible," said Cicely decidedly. "Those two hate each other."

"Then ask Mrs. Davidson alone," persisted Roger.

"I don't see why I should," said Cicely defiantly.

"Because she has done more for you than any one in Cheltenham, and you have never offered any return for her hospitality," said Roger decidedly, "and because I won't have her slighted again. I must insist, Cicely."

Cicely perceived that his tone was not to be gainsaid. "Oh, very well," she said coldly. "I'll tell her it's your wish." And so, her new burst of spirits already deadened, she left him without a farewell, and went away to her engagement.

§

The reception to which she was bound was held at one of the few "great houses" of Cheltenham. The hosts were pleasant, conventional people, with the cultivation produced by much travel and much social experience, and without an ounce of originality between them. Cicely had known so many of their sort all her life that she had warmed to them at once; their beautiful house, their quietly sumptuous raiment, the perfection of ordered luxury that surrounded them, brought her at once into an accustomed atmosphere, and obviated the need of any deeper congeniality. She had entered into a degree of intimacy with them, and gave them the sort of affection that a kitten gives to a very comfortable lap.

As soon as Cicely had entered the beautifully decorated rooms and greeted the bland hostesses, Mrs. Reynolds came strolling towards her, very striking in a big black hat that suited her lazy beauty.

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"I've been Sister-Anning by the window, watching for you, Cissy," she remarked. "I can't go into that dining-room without a kindred spirit. I hear the eats are simply divine."

"The whole thing is very nice," said Cicely, looking around her critically. "That's beautiful, that banking of orchids and maidenhair,— and the library, with the American Beauties and smilax,— yes, it's really charming. Risky, I'm going to have an 'at-home' myself."

"You are! When?" said Mrs. Reynolds.

"The twenty-ninth of January," said Cicely. "Will you come?"

"Depends on which kind of an at-home it is," returned Mrs. Reynolds non-committally.

"Which kind?" repeated Cicely. "Why, there's only one kind, isn't there,— the talking-and-eating kind?"

"No, there are two," stated her oracle; "the decent, civilised kind, like this, and the academic, genteel-pauper, home-made-food-and-clothes kind. I won't come if it's the usual academic stunt."

Cicely was silent a moment, thinking. Mrs. Reynolds had a very strong influence upon her; she could never be five minutes in her friend's presence without imbibing her friend's opinions; and now, in the midst of this delightful luxury, there really seemed but one possible point of view. She had a rapid vision of the kind of function Roger would prefer, with Mrs. Davidson presiding in an ancient gown, and Hitty thrusting food at the guests in her point-of-the-bayonet manner; and instantly, forgetting her purpose in embarking on the undertaking, she made her decision.

"It's going to be this kind;" said she, "and I want you to receive with me. Will you?"

"Will I not!" said Mrs. Reynolds with alacrity. "I'll have a new gown for it. A proper spirit like yours deserves encouraging."

"I'll find out from Mrs. Milton who her florist is," said Cicely, reflecting aloud, "and engage him right away. And I'll get her caterer, too; Le Fils is well enough for a dinner, but I ought to have some one from the city for a big affair. And,—let me see—she had her cards from Tiffany's; I will too."

"That's the way to talk!" applauded Mrs. Reynolds. "Since you're such a sport, I'll go to Béatrice for my gown; I'd hate to lower the tone of the affair."

"There's that about it, too," said Cicely thoughtfully. "I have to consider the general effect. I believe I won't have the Department wives assist at all."

"Good business," said Mrs. Reynolds approvingly. "Since I'm included, you won't make any mistake to drop the rest. Look at Sister Davidson, there in the library! She must have borrowed that hat from Noah's wife. If you had her on view, people would think you were holding a bazaar for the Old Ladies' Home."

"So they would!" agreed Cicely. "No, I'll ask Mrs. Milton for the tea, and Mrs. Gregory for the chocolate, and Mrs. Evans for the coffee, and Mrs. Sheridan—yes, I must have Mrs. Sheridan, she has such adorable clothes;—I'll have champagne frappé for her to serve."

"Now you're getting into your pace!" observed Mrs. Reynolds, beginning to twinkle with amusement. "Can't you think of something else?"

"I might have a little orchestra," said Cicely meditatively.

"So you might!" approved Mrs. Reynolds. "These Hungarian triplets are playing like a dream; and they're thin,—they'd just fit into the cubby-hole under your stairs. Why don't you get them?"

"I will, right away," said Cicely promptly. "And — let me see — I might get a gown."

"I'm sure you need one!" said Mrs. Reynolds satirically.

"I do, frightfully," agreed Cicely. "I haven't had a stitch for weeks and weeks."

"Come with me to Béatrice, then," suggested Mrs. Reynolds, "and get a regular sizzler."

"All right," said Cicely. "I'll go with you to-morrow; and I'll telegraph for the other things on the way home to-day. What a help you are, Risky, in making plans!"

"Oh, the pleasure is mine!" said Mrs. Reynolds, with her mocking smile. "I like to water a fruitful sprout like you."

§

"Well, the die is cast, Roger!" remarked Cicely at dinner. "I've made all the preliminary arrangements. Be sure not to have any engagement for January twenty-ninth."

"You want the men, do you?" asked Roger, trying not to look depressed.

"Oh, yes!" said Cicely; and suddenly the memory of her first intention, eclipsed by the later glittering details,

came back to her uncomfortably. "I want the men especially," she said. "I'm going to ask all your colleagues."

"Did you—did you see Mrs. Davidson?" asked Roger, with constraint. He hated to reopen the subject, but a vague misgiving urged him to it.

"Oh, yes," said Cicely; and hurried on nervously, "and I saw Mrs. Elton, and the Bennetts, and the Kingsleys, and simply *everybody*. The President was there, giving me his hand to kiss. Mrs. Kaltenborn was eating herself purple in the face."

"Cicely," said Roger, "did you ask Mrs. Davidson?"

"Did I ask her what?" returned Cicely flippantly. "If she was well, or if she wanted the vote?"

Roger rose from his unfinished dinner, and stood looking down at her. His face was stern. "I'm not going to urge you to tell me, Cicely," he said slowly, "because,—as things are,—I don't dare to risk the wrong answer. I only remind you of what I've said, and tell you that if you can't see your way to granting me this, I shall never ask you anything again. I'm going over to the laboratory now to coach some fellows. When I come back I hope we shall be able to talk about this thing."

Cicely sat on the edge of her chair, thinking rapidly. Her whole being resented coercion, especially on the subject of Mrs. Davidson; but she knew as well as Roger the critical nature of the situation, and dared not refuse. Leaving her dinner to grow cold in company with his, she rose and went to the telephone.

"Mrs. Davidson?" she said, when that lady had answered her call. "This is Cicely Ford. I'm afraid I've interrupted your dinner."

"I can eat dinner every day, and I don't often have a chance to chat with you," said Mrs. Davidson's pleasant voice; however trying Cicely might be, her generosity and her affection for Roger kept her patient. "I haven't seen you for weeks, until this afternoon,— and then I only had a comet-glimpse as you flashed by."

"I had to hurry; and we've been extremely busy lately," said Cicely in a cool voice. "Mrs. Davidson, we're having a reception on the twenty-ninth, and I want to ask you to receive with me."

"You're having a reception!" repeated Mrs. Davidson. "Why, what ambitious young hosts you are! Is it to be a large one?"

"Very large!" said Cicely emphatically. "Everybody in the whole place!"

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Davidson. "Isn't that a trifle — rash?"

"Not at all," said Cicely coldly. "It's all settled. Will you receive?"

There was a perceptible pause; then Mrs. Davidson said slowly, "Are you quite sure you want me?"

"I'm *asking* you!" said Cicely.

"I know," said Mrs. Davidson, "but — I can't help realising that you had an opportunity to ask me face to face this afternoon, and didn't care to. I'd rather not do it, Mrs. Ford, unless I feel that you really wish it."

"I don't know what more I can say," said Cicely stubbornly. "I've asked you, and I ask you again. Will you?"

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Davidson quietly, "I think I won't."

Cicely was dismayed. Roger's face came before her with its look of uncompromising sternness, and she pre- visioned the consequences of such news as this.

"Oh, please, Mrs. Davidson!" she cried in a panic. "Roger wants it so much! Please!"

"Oh,—Roger wants it!" said Mrs. Davidson, with an odd inflection.

"Very, very much!" urged Cicely artlessly. "Please do it!"

"Very well," said Mrs. Davidson, "I'll do it—for Roger."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Cicely in a burst of relief. "It's *very* good of you! Shall I—" but the other receiver had snapped into its hook, and she spoke into vacancy.

"Well!" she exclaimed, sitting back in her chair, "that's cool! She might be royalty." The panic and the relief both died in her, and anger took their place. "This is what comes of letting Roger dictate to me!" she told herself. "I ruin my party, and get snubbed for my pains. A pretty state of things! Am I to be a slave, knocked about by everybody, simply because I'm married? Is that his idea?"

So Roger, returning an hour later, got no look or word of greeting from the very erect Cicely who sat making lists at her desk. He stood behind her for a moment, watching her longingly.

"Well, Cicely," he ventured, in a tone that he strove to make nonchalant, "is everything settled?"

"Yes," said Cicely.

"Good!" exclaimed Roger, with a long breath of relief. "Shall we talk it over, then?"

"No," said Cicely.

Roger stood irresolute. His heart and his arms cried out for her; the sight of the soft hair, fair at its roots like a baby's, waving upwards from her slim white neck, brought a sob into his throat. But he did not dare go nearer. With a great sigh, he turned silently away.

§

The day of the reception came in sleet and snow, and changed to drizzle and chilly thaw in time for the festivity. Cicely stood by the window and stared out into the dreary street. The pavement was a mass of slush, and the few pedestrians splashed forlornly, cowering within their turned-up collars under the icy rain. The florists' men were departing, their wagon littered with empty boxes and broken bits of green; they were drenched and chilled, and their profanity mingled discordantly with the shrill scolding of Hitty as she wiped up their muddy tracks. Inside the house, the haughty caterers were grumbling at the inadequacy of the space and equipment, the long-haired, unsavoury Hungarians were quarrelling loudly, and the imported cloak-room maids giggled scornfully with the waiters.

"Oh, what a diabolical business!" thought Cicely. "It's like all my life since I came into this house,— everything going wrong, everybody disappointing me.— What a horrible world this is!"

Very soon the two assistant hostesses arrived,— Mrs.

Reynolds lazily, maliciously charming in pale yellow embroidered Oriental-wise with green and gold, Mrs. Davidson calm and self-unconscious in a plain black gown that showed several seasons' wear. They had come in the same carriage (owing to the highly practical policy of the Cheltenham livery company, which made it a rule to kill two birds with one stone whenever possible), and Cicely thought she detected signs already of the inevitable clash between them. She spurred herself into animation, and went forward to greet them with as much cordiality as she could assume.

"You valiant creatures!" she said. "I'm your debtor for life. You both deserve the Legion of Honour for this."

"I should say we did!" scolded Mrs. Reynolds. "Who ever heard of having such a day for a reception? It might do for mermaids,— mermaids and Polar bears,— but for Christians it's simply an outrage!"

"But after all," said Mrs. Davidson,— who had evidently come armoured in a firm resolve to be tactful and long-suffering and make the best of things,— "it might be worse. There are so many annoying things that might have happened through some one's negligence; but nobody is to blame for the weather."

"Oh, I know; God makes it," said Mrs. Reynolds, with a grimace at Cicely. "Cissy, how heavenly your gown is! Béatrice has outdone herself. If only weather-makers were as reliable as dress-makers— Never mind, Mrs. Davidson, I'm not going to say anything! I'm only remarking that Béatrice is a pippin."

Mrs. Davidson's figure had stiffened so ominously that Cicely hastened into the breach. "Well, I hope

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somebody will come!" said she. "This house is so full of food that it may explode any minute, unless a few vigorous appetites happen along."

"Mrs. Kaltenborn will help you out," remarked Mrs. Reynolds, "and so will Mr. Sure-Cure-for-Frog-in-the-Throat. And so will the Human Glassworks,—is she coming?"

"Mrs. de Mullen?" said Cicely. "I don't know; I'm rather in her black books."

"I hope she shows up, then," said Mrs. Reynolds. "She's luscious when she's in a bad temper. We'll bait her, Cissy. You be the picador, and I'll be the toreador."

Mrs. Davidson looked very disapproving. "You mustn't forget," she said, "that Mrs. de Mullen has feelings as well as the rest of us. She may not have had many advantages, but she is full of kindness if one approaches her in the right way."

"Oh, I've no doubt she has nice hair and is good to her mother," said Mrs. Reynolds flippantly. "Cissy, what did hubby say to the Hungarians? Did he gnash his teeth?"

"Oh, no," answered Cicely, a little disconcerted, "he didn't say anything. It's time for them to start; I must tell them."

"What, have you an *orchestra?*" exclaimed Mrs. Davidson, in a tone which said plainer than words, "Roger certainly has self-command!"

Cicely was nettled. "We have the customary appurtenances of civilisation!" she said, and added to herself as she walked away, "That woman will be the

death of me! I shall throw something at her before I'm through."

When she returned from interviewing the musicians, Roger had appeared, and was greeting her coadjutors. He had just begun to realise the magnificence of the preparations, and looked harassed and grave. Cicely could see the two women studying his face, one with anxious sympathy, the other with amusement. Her dissatisfaction received a new fillip. What right had Roger to look so solemn, and make her dismal reception a shade more forlorn? What right had Mrs. Davidson to yearn over him as if she possessed him? As for Mrs. Reynolds, Cicely was always ill at ease and fearful when her husband and her cherished friend were together. She made haste to rejoin the group and break off the conversation.

"Roger, excuse me, but the telephone is ringing," she said. "Will you go, please? — I'm sorry to interrupt, Mrs. Davidson, but I can't go myself; people may come at any minute."

"It's very early," said Mrs. Davidson, rather coldly.

"Oh, the kind of people who come on a day like this are always the early birds!" said Mrs. Reynolds, rallying promptly to her friend's support. "They come for the worms. Nobody'd come for anything else in such weather. I predict there won't be a soul here to-day but the hungry freaks, Cissy,— and, of course, your beaux; earthquakes wouldn't keep *them* away."

Mrs. Davidson looked disapproving again, and, perceiving it, Mrs. Reynolds chattered on with gusto.

"You know Cissy has every bachelor in this place

soldered to her apronstrings!" she said. "That nice little Andrews in the classical department is simply off his head about her. So is Beau Brummel Beecher. And poor Mr. Philosophy-and-Ethics Lyman,—she's taken away all his philosophy, and all his ethics too."

"Oh, Risky, what nonsense you talk!" said Cicely, laughing. "They only like me to tell their love affairs to."

"Rubbish!" said Mrs. Reynolds. "You know as well as I do that you're a natural-born heart-breaker. I wish I had your knack."

At this Mrs. Davidson's disapproval boiled up so vigorously that an explosion seemed imminent; but while Cicely was nervously hunting for means to avert it, and Mrs. Reynolds was awaiting it with amused interest, Roger came back from the telephone with news.

"It was Mrs. Gregory," he announced. "She says it's such a disagreeable day she thinks she won't venture out, and asks you to excuse her."

Mrs. Reynolds smiled maliciously. "What did I tell you?" she said. "There's one lily-of-the-field gone. You mark me, Cissy, nobody'll be here to-day but the sad ones. I wouldn't have come myself for anybody but you."

Cicely bit her lip in vexation. "How could she?" she exclaimed. "She promised me faithfully,—and with all those automobiles, too! But I'll just move Mrs. Sheridan to the chocolate, and have a waiter serve the frappé. Mrs. Milton will like that better, anyway; she and Mrs. Sheridan are great friends. Here she comes now."

"That's the idea!" approved Mrs. Reynolds. "Show them they can't cripple you; I'll back you to do it.—I like to see a really good sport, don't you?" she added to Mrs. Davidson.

But in a moment, when Cicely returned with a clouded brow from welcoming Mrs. Milton, and admitted that that lady had come charged with Mrs. Sheridan's regrets, Mrs. Reynolds burst into gleeful laughter.

"They're like autumn leaves, Cissy!" she jeered. "They're falling fast. What shall you do now—put another waiter behind the chocolate? Be sure to get one that matches it, so Mrs. Drummond will have a pleasant picture to face."

"It's too vexatious!" said Cicely, indignantly. "I only asked four; I never thought of anybody's treating me like this. Well, there's only one thing to do,—I shall have to ask you to take the chocolate, Mrs. Davidson, please."

"I think Mrs. Reynolds had better," interposed Roger quickly, with true masculine tact.

"Why do you?" inquired Mrs. Reynolds, smiling mockingly.

"Because—because—you know the dining-room so well," blundered Roger. "You can find your way around."

"Oh, thank you!" said Mrs. Reynolds. "You flatter me."

"Mrs. Davidson has normal intelligence, too!" said Cicely, with a little irritated laugh. "If you'll come this way, please, Mrs. Davidson —"

"I want Mrs. Davidson to help you receive your guests," said Roger resolutely.

"I really think, Roger," said Mrs. Davidson rather nervously, "that I'd better go."

"Please do not," said Roger. His chin was set, and he looked stubbornly determined.

"Roger, let her, if she wishes to!" exclaimed Cicely in uncontrollable exasperation.

"Oh, don't come to blows!" drawled Mrs. Reynolds. "I'm going—going—gone." She looked back over her green-and-golden shoulder with an impish gleam. "Let the soul-feast go on just as if I were present!" she added.

Cicely gave a short, hard laugh. Roger, triumphant, but a good deal embarrassed, shuffled uncomfortably for a moment, and then moved away. Nobody spoke. Cicely, glancing at Mrs. Davidson, saw her gathering those forces of patience and forgiveness in which she had come arrayed, and was stirred to new anger: "If she makes herself look one single bit more saintly," she thought savagely, "I shall swear!"

Into this strained moment entered, as if shot out of a providential cannon, the ever-prompt Mrs. Simms, with her husband trailing behind her. In deference to the weather the lady wore a short-skirted tweed costume, a little round hat, and stout boots; but her lord had honoured the occasion by a long frock coat that enveloped him from the collar to the calves, out of which his mild face and timid little nose rose modestly; and, as usual, Mrs. Simms so dominated her accessories that it took a

penetrating eye to observe her toilette at all, while her husband straggled across the room in the guise of a large coat with a very small man tucked into it by an after-thought.

“How do you do, Mrs. Ford! How do you do, Mrs. Davidson!” said Mrs. Simms briskly. “The weather is unfavourable, but I resolved not to let it make any difference in my plans. As I said to my husband, a duty is a duty, especially on a rainy day. Amos! Oh, there you are. Come here.”

“I’m very glad to see you, Mrs. Simms!” said Cicely, with an unwonted degree of sincerity. “You are certainly a public benefactor. And you, Mr. Simms,—how good of you to come!”

Dr. Simms smiled with mild complaisance. “Well, Mrs. Simms was anxious to have me,” he explained ingenuously, “and of course her will is my law.”

“I’m sure of that,” said Cicely, her mischievous instincts reviving. “And you’re a man who has great respect for the law, aren’t you?”

“Why, I hope I am no loose misdemeanant,” returned Dr. Simms, swelling with conscious virtue under her deferential gaze. “My worst foe, I trust, could not point to any felonious actions in my past.”

“How grateful you must be to Mrs. Simms,” suggested Cicely, “for shielding you from temptation, and keeping your life pure and beautiful! There’s nothing like a good prop, is there?”

“Nothing, indeed,” agreed Dr. Simms politely. “Your husband, my esteemed colleague, must also appreciate your aid and support.”

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"Ah, as to support," said Cicely, "I fear I don't support him in the style to which he's accustomed. I'm not at all like your supreme, all-subduing wife."

"On the contrary, Mrs. Ford," exclaimed the learned man with conviction (for Cicely's charms always had a powerfully stimulating effect on him), "I should say you were, if not her prototype, at least her facsimile!"

Mrs. Simms, scenting gallantry in the air, turned sharply around. "Amos!" she said. "Why don't you speak to Mrs. Davidson? I'm surprised at you!"

"My dear," said Dr. Simms with unexpected spirit, "all in good time. I am having a delightful conversation with Mrs. Ford."

"That's no reason," returned Mrs. Simms, in a resonant undertone, "why you should ignore or neglect your other social duties. Speak to Mrs. Davidson."

Her manner admitted of no appeal, and the well-trained Amos reluctantly left his hostess' side. Mrs. Simms took his place. Her jaw had already begun to acquire the look of iron rigour which intercourse with Cicely was apt to give it.

"Mr. Simms," she remarked severely, "is naturally social and conversational, and, like most of his sex, he has no sense of fitness. I was obliged to hurry him."

"Greatly to my loss," said Cicely. "I find him such a cavalier!"

Mrs. Simms' lips tightened. "He mustn't dawdle," she said. "He's very much inclined to waste his time."

"I'm sure he wastes very little time with you!" said Cicely sweetly.

"H'm!" returned Mrs. Simms, with a boring glance of her sharp eyes.

"I mean," explained Cicely, "that you don't allow the time spent with you to be wasted. You keep improving him every minute."

"I have his interests at heart, certainly," said Mrs. Simms, "if that's what you mean."

"At heart and in hand," said Cicely admiringly. "And himself in hand too. How do you make him so — plastic? I wish I had a husband like that!"

"I expect," said Mrs. Simms somewhat grimly, "you'll have to manage with the husband you have. Amos!"

"To make married life one grand sweet song," mused Cicely, "I suppose it is better for one to sing a good deal louder than the other."

"I am sure," exclaimed the gallant Dr. Simms, catching this remark, "that any man would be delighted to sing second to Mrs. Ford!"

"Amos, what nonsense you talk!" said Mrs. Simms severely. "If Mrs. Ford's husband has any sense, he'll sing as loud as he can. Come!" With a brief bow to the hostesses, she led him sternly away.

"Aren't they a lark!" said Cicely, her spirits somewhat restored by the encounter. "I nearly had her stabbing me, and Amy rushing to my defence. I wish Clarissa had been here."

Mrs. Davidson, however, was by no means so easily cheered. She disapproved of all the atmosphere of this festivity, she disapproved of Cicely's method of entertaining her guests, and she disapproved on principle of Mrs. Reynolds: moreover, though magnanimous, she was

human, and had not enjoyed her forced retention in her position as hostess, nor Dr. Simms' forced attentions to her. She had always a good deal of advice that longed to expend itself on Cicely, and this time it could not all be restrained.

"Perhaps it is just as well that Mrs. Reynolds is *not* here," she said. "I must say frankly that I don't admire her; and I'm afraid, my dear, she doesn't always have the best effect on you."

"Oh, mon dieu!" remarked Cicely to herself, "here it comes!" Her mouth set mutinously. "You're quite mistaken," she said aloud. "Risky has an excellent effect on me. She brightens me up."

"Do you think," returned Mrs. Davidson, "that it's a desirable brightening, when it leads you to ridicule well-meaning people, and be untrue to your best self? Mrs. Reynolds may be very clever, but — forgive me — she is not womanly or kind."

"She's my best friend," said Cicely, lifting her chin sharply.

"Then, dear child," said Mrs. Davidson, "you should choose a different best friend. You know that every one who touches our 'lives closely influences us, for good or bad; if the influence —"

"Oh, help me," besought Cicely of her inmost self, "not to make a face at her, and not to swear!"

"If the influence is bad, it ought to be removed from our lives before it takes root. Roger, I know, would agree with me. If some one gains an ascendancy over us to our hurt, we should sever the bond at any cost."

"*Sacré!*" ejaculated Cicely vehemently; and then looked aghast at her own depravity.

"I didn't catch what you said, my dear," said Mrs. Davidson, with mild reproach.

"It's just as well," murmured Cicely; and to herself she added, "I must shut her off, quick, before I get driven to do it in English!"

Fortunately, at this juncture a little group of people appeared at the door,—science-department people, who lived in the same neighbourhood, and, venturing forth out of clan-loyalty, had drifted into a coalition on the way. They were the shy young Hoods, the profoundly scientific Dr. Sherman and his no less scientific wife, the serene and well-dressed Welshes, and comfortable Mrs. Kaltenborn. In that empty little drawing-room they appeared quite a throng; Cicely greeted them with enthusiasm, and Mrs. Davidson with some relief. The scene attained a specious aspect of festivity, due to the frequent repetition of the phrase, "So glad to see you!" and to the fact that several people were speaking at once.

"Vell, it's rainy vedder!" said Mrs. Kaltenborn cheerfully.

"So it is," agreed Cicely. "I hope you didn't get wet."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Kaltenborn. "I lift up my skirt high,—ferry high. I got a goot flannel petticoat; it don't shpot."

"You're fortunate," said Cicely. "Was it part of your trousseau?"

"No, dat von vore out alretty," said Mrs. Kaltenborn thoughtfully. "Dis von I got ten years ago in New

York, or it's maybe elefen. Are you getting goot flannel in Paris?"

"I don't know; I never got any there," said Cicely.

"Neffer got any!" repeated Mrs. Kaltenborn, with an amazed look. "Of vat are you making your petticoats, den?"

"I never made any," admitted Cicely. "I don't know how."

"My, my!" said Mrs. Kaltenborn, raising her hands. "Vell, I'll teach you. I got a goot pattern. It vould keep you fine and varm; I t'ink it go arount you twice alretty. I'll gif it to you."

"Oh, Mrs. Kaltenborn!" exclaimed Cicely, realising the magnitude of the favour, "this is too much!"

"Oh, not ven you get used to it," replied that literal lady. "It makes you walk a liddle slow, dat's all. Vell, I tink I go get someting to eat." She nodded amiably, and ambled at a slightly accelerated pace towards the dining-room.

"Mrs. Kaltenborn is more fun than a picnic!" said Cicely, turning back to Mrs. Davidson with dancing eyes, as the others strayed away. "If her husband is as funny as she is, they ought to go on the vaudeville stage. 'The Kute Kaltenborns, in their Refined Domestic Skit, 'Hearts Enchained by Wienerwurst Links,'"—wouldn't they make a success?"

Mrs. Davidson tried to smile politely, but only succeeded in looking pained. She clearly wanted to explain that Dr. Kaltenborn was a very eminent scientist, and Mrs. Kaltenborn an excellent housekeeper and wife; and Cicely, seeing the remark on its way, hastened to

forestall it, for fear it would tempt her beyond her strength.

"Mrs. Welsh had a very pretty gown on," she observed. "What a nice combination, that garnet and rose-colour! She dresses charmingly."

"Her husband has independent means," said Mrs. Davidson significantly.

"All husbands should have," remarked Cicely. "It's an accomplishment that graces any man."

Mrs. Davidson shook her head. "Oh, it matters so little!" she said. "Haven't you ever noticed how few of the great men of the world have had wealth? Martin Luther — Columbus — Napoleon — Abraham Lincoln — those, and countless other glorious names, belonged to men with no other fortune."

"Well, a name, even a pretty one, isn't of much use with nothing behind it," returned Cicely. "A name like Rothschild looks a lot more appealing on a cheque than a name like Saint Francis."

Mrs. Davidson looked shocked. "I'm afraid you haven't escaped the modern taint of commercialism," she said. "Try to do it, my dear. That's one of the first things we learn from our lovely life in Cheltenham; here, if anywhere, money is worthless."

"Yes, so I've noticed," remarked Cicely. "It's like heaven in that,— there isn't any. Oh, here comes another visitor; how wonderful!"

There was a bustle in the hallway, and, regally brushing aside the straggling group around the drawing-room door, Mrs. de Mullen sailed in. She was too fashionable to come early, but not fashionable enough to stay away;

in spite of her distrust of Cicely, an invitation to the little red house was still a thing to be considered. She came in full war-paint, feathers nodding, chains jingling, jewels twinkling; but as her husband could not be viewed in the aspect of an ornament, and as there would be no occasion for him to honour drafts, she had left him at home.

“Howdy-do, Mrs. Ford! Howdy-do, Mrs. Davidson!” she said graciously, shaking hands with her plump elbow raised high, in a manner of supreme elegance. “What unpropitious weather, is it not? Quite preposterous!”

“Fabulous!” returned Cicely, her eyes beginning to dance again.

“But I would brave more elements than these,” added Mrs. de Mullen benignly, “to encourage Mrs. Ford in her hospitality. What a charming function you are having, Mrs. Ford! Very chick, as the French say.”

“Oh, I must call Mrs. Reynolds!” exclaimed Cicely. “She wouldn’t miss you for anything. Excuse me a minute.”

“Mrs. Reynolds will see Mrs. de Mullen in the dining-room!” interposed Mrs. Davidson quickly.

“She can’t wait that long,” answered Cicely, flying away: and in a moment she was flying back again with her chosen mate. “She’s so grateful to me for bringing her!” she added breathlessly. “She says she would never have forgiven me if I hadn’t.”

“I appreciate your conversation so keenly, Mrs. de Mullen,” drawled Mrs. Reynolds, “that I forsook the

howling, hungry mob at the peril of my life, to enjoy it."

"You surprise me," said Mrs. de Mullen, accepting the tribute with an affable gesture. "I did not suppose there would be such a mêlée of people,— the weather being, as I said to Mrs. Ford, so unpropitious."

"Oh, is it?" asked Mrs. Reynolds, wide-eyed.

"Yes, it's raining," said Cicely sweetly. "Several people have told me so. You ought to be canonized, Mrs. de Mullen, for coming out."

"Canonized!" repeated Mrs. de Mullen, stiffening. "A bombardment would be a strange return, Mrs. Ford, for a Good Samaritan deed!"

"Mrs. Ford means a salute with cannon," suggested Mrs. Reynolds, "such as they give to royalty. A salvo, you know."

"Yes, that's it," said Cicely. "What the French call a *quid pro quo*."

"Mrs. de Mullen," interrupted Mrs. Davidson, in a voice trenchant with suppressed indignation, "how is your house getting on?"

The two conspirators exchanged a delighted glance; the topic could not have been more congenial.

"My shottoe, I thank you, Mrs. Davidson," said Mrs. de Mullen majestically, "is progressing favourably."

"Have you got the architraves in yet?" inquired Mrs. Reynolds.

"I — ah — I haven't observed," returned Mrs. de Mullen stiffly.

"Or the spandrels?" asked Cicely, with earnest interest.

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"Perhaps Mrs. de Mullen isn't going to keep kennels, Cissy!" admonished Mrs. Reynolds.

"I shall have whatever is on reggle in the best shot-toes, Mrs. Reynolds!" said Mrs. de Mullen haughtily.

"Mrs. de Mullen," interrupted Mrs. Davidson again, in a voice eloquent with outraged feeling, "I'm sure you would like some sort of refreshment."

"I thank you, Mrs. Davidson," retorted Mrs. de Mullen severely, aware of something wrong in the deference surrounding her, and hastening to include this innocent lady in her distrust, "I am not such a gormet as you suppose! I frequently go hours and hours without food."

"Then you certainly must have something to eat now!" said Mrs. Reynolds, seizing her by the arm. "Come with me, and I'll fill you right up to the chin with Cissy's lovely party stuff. It's awfully expensive; it'll make you feel at home."

"Yes, do!" exclaimed Cicely, seizing the other arm. "I'll come and help fill you. Forward, march!"

"Mrs. Ford," said Mrs. Davidson authoritatively, "stay here."

"Why?" demanded Cicely, like a naughty child. "I want to give Mrs. de Mullen a square meal; Risky will starve her."

"I will not!" said Mrs. Reynolds. "I'll feed her better than you would, Cissy; I don't have to pay the bills."

Mrs. de Mullen indignantly withdrew both her sleeves from their grasp. "I shall not invade the dining-room

at all," she said icily. "I have an ample supply of refreshments at my own residence." She rustled furiously away, without a backward glance.

"Oh, waffles and griddle-cakes, wasn't that fun!" cried Mrs. Reynolds, convulsed. "There goes your invitation to the shottoe, Cissy, on the tip of that proudly elevated nose."

"*Repoussé* — as the French say," laughed Cicely. "Oh, no, you're wrong, Risky; I can coax her round again."

"I should advise you to leave her alone," said Mrs. Davidson indignantly. "And you, Mrs. Reynolds,— I think you had better go back to your post. You have been away from it long enough."

"I'm going; don't worry," said Mrs. Reynolds. "I couldn't stay long in this rarefied atmosphere. But that interview was worth a sacrifice or two. Call me if there's any more excitement, Cissy."

"I wonder at you, Mrs. Ford," said Mrs. Davidson severely, as Mrs. Reynolds trailed away. "Roger would not approve of this, I can assure you."

Cicely knew well enough that she had behaved abominably, but Mrs. Davidson's righteous superiority only made her more recalcitrant. "Roger has more sense than to meddle in my affairs!" she retorted. "When Mrs. de Mullen acquires civilization (if she ever does), he will be delighted to think that I had a hand in it. Thank goodness, here come some more people,— another addition to the Noble Army of Martyrs!"

Now indeed a steady small trickle of visitors began to stray in, linger damply for a while, and stray out

into ~~the~~ rain again. They served the purpose of preserving the illusion that this was a reception, and of preventing complete disaster in the receiving party, where Cicely's recklessness was mounting beyond bounds, and Mrs. Davidson's self-control was wearing thin. But they added little to the gaiety of the occasion; they were nearly all the "sad ones" whose coming Mrs. Reynolds had foretold, and though now and then a motor-car dropped a pretty gown or a smart silk hat at the door, these were few and far between, and, having come simply because they were too bored to stay at home, contributed small glitter. Cards arrived in quantities, by post or by messenger; the telephone kept ringing with profuse regrets from special friends who had promised to be on hand; the flowers and Hungarians and hostesses struggled more and more vainly with their dismal surroundings; and at the end of an hour the occasion stood baldly forth, a self-confessed failure.

"Oh, what's the use!" cried Cicely to Mrs. Davidson, with suddenly acute impatience. "Why do we pretend this is a party? Why do we keep up this grisly mockery of 'receiving' the empty air? We look like a pair of stuffed alligators. Let's stop."

Mrs. Davidson, not unnaturally, failed to greet this tribute with enthusiasm. "I don't agree with you," she said stiffly. "Why shouldn't we receive, if that is what we are here for? What else should we do?"

"Well, you may do what you wish," replied Cicely, "but I'm going to stop making a joke of myself!" and forthwith, deserting her post, she flew across the room and peeped out into the hall in search of excitement.

Excitement was a thing Cicely seldom had to seek in vain. She was one of those people who draw events like a magnet; and if none came to her of its own accord, she could always create one. This time she found material ready to her hand: it was the hour of the day when the younger men stopped work and went a-pleasuring, and, as they were not afraid of weather, and all devoted to Cicely, they were beginning to arrive in force. She greeted them with delight, and, shaking hands unceremoniously with them two at a time, drew them into the room, and settled them cosily around her in a corner. Now that there was something going on, she was instantly in gay spirits; mirth and laughter began to rise about her like an aura, and intoxicate her. Lowering her voice, she plunged into an animated description of the afternoon's programme, mimicking the visitors one after another with irresistible drollery. Shouts of appreciation drowned the Hungarian wails, and her encircling admirers crowded closer and closer: each new arrival, drawn by the visible merriment, came post-haste to join the group; and presently the whole bachelor contingent was welded into a tight mass in one corner of the drawing-room, exploding with glee.

Mrs. Davidson, still standing at her post at the other end of the room, high-principled and alone, stiffened minute by minute into more and more intense disapproval. She could follow Cicely's pranks plainly enough, as Mrs. Kaltenborn's slow turtle-gestures succeeded Mrs. Simms' iron-firm jaw; and the fact that she could not hear the conversation did not tend to make her indorse it the more warmly. At last she could stand it no longer.

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Abandoning her post, she crossed the room with a determined step, and joined the group.

"Gentlemen, I shall have to interrupt you," she said firmly. "I must speak to Mrs. Ford. I think you will find Mr. Ford in the dining-room."

The men, who had been too absorbed to observe her approach, jumped up in some confusion, and received their dismissal with barely concealed chagrin. Cicely rose too, flushing violently. She understood her mentor's action clearly enough, and was furiously angry; and as soon as the hall door had swallowed her admirers, she turned with flashing eyes and stood at defiance.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded hotly.

"For your own good," said Mrs. Davidson severely. "You are neglecting your duty, and receiving too much attention from too many men."

"Am I indeed!" said Cicely. "Who told you that, please?"

"My own eyes told me," said Mrs. Davidson, flushing also. "Not only now, but many other times. It will not be long, let me assure you, before other people's tongues tell me too."

Cicely was growing steadily more angry, but also more self-possessed. It was only Roger who could make her forget past, present and future in blind passion, because the pain of quarrelling with him set her beside herself. Now that she saw Mrs. Davidson losing a little of her own well-controlled temper, she laughed lightly.

"How interesting!" she said. "Whom will they wag about? The President? Dr. Simms? Promise to tell me what they say!"

Mrs. Davidson compressed her lips. "They will choose a subject much more dangerous to your reputation," she said. "You force me, Mrs. Ford, to give you a warning that I would rather withhold. Your conduct with unmarried men is not at all what that of a married woman,—a university professor's wife,—should be."

"No, it is appalling," agreed Cicely solemnly. "Pouring them a cup of tea in the afternoon!—sitting in a corner alone with ten of them!—what an example for the young!"

Mrs. Davidson grew a deep, exasperated red. "You know very well what I mean!" she said. "It is all bad enough, but your behaviour with young Maddox is outrageous. At the last cotillion you danced with him eleven times."

"Did I really!" exclaimed Cicely. "What a shame! I truly meant to make it a dozen. I'll give him thirteen at the next one, to make up. Thank you for keeping count."

"It is high time you began to keep count for yourself!" said Mrs. Davidson, too angry for discretion. "You will soon be a scandal. Your youth does not excuse you; if you are old enough to be married, you are old enough to be responsible for your actions."

"I agree with you!" retorted Cicely. "And that being the case, I will go now to my telephone and ask my friend Mr. Maddox to come to my house and have tea with me." And, head high, eyes flashing, she hurried past the older woman and out of the room.

"He will be here in five minutes!" she said, returning. "Meanwhile, have you anything more to say?"

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Mrs. Davidson steadied herself with an effort. "I have," she said, "but I think I will say it to Roger. It will fall on more fruitful ground."

"It will be flung back in your face!" flashed Cicely. "If you think you can make my husband listen to slanders against me, you are mistaken. He has not your sort of mind."

"Mrs. Ford, be careful!" besought Mrs. Davidson, alarmed. "You are saying too much. Please don't speak to me again until you can speak differently."

"That will be never!" cried Cicely. "Go and whisper scandal to Roger, if you wish; I shall watch for my friend." With that she swept away to the window, brushing past Mrs. Davidson as if she were of too little account to be perceived.

Very soon the boy appeared, bright-eyed with excitement and flushed with running. Cicely met him at the door with eyes as bright as his, and, leading him to the farthest corner of the drawing-room, sat down with him on a divan and plunged into low-voiced conversation. They talked about nothing,—the favours at the last dance, the rehearsals for the play,—but their heads were intimately close, and Cicely, alert, had the satisfaction of seeing Mrs. Davidson observing them from the doorway. She intensified the note of intimacy, speaking more softly and laughing a great deal. The boy, mystified but delighted, met her rather better than half-way, with feverish zest. They were like conspirators plotting, or lovers whispering, together. The few remaining guests, coming to say farewell, saw their hostess

so absorbed, and withdrew in silence. Mrs. Davidson disappeared from the doorway with a shocked face.

It was growing late, and Cicely was very tired. What little amusement there had been in the thing stalled suddenly; the boy, now that he had served his purpose, bored her; she wanted only Roger, and, failing him, peace and rest. She rose with one of her impetuous movements, bringing the boy unexpectedly to his feet.

"Go home now, Pancakes," she said.

"But I want to stay!" he urged. "I've got lots of interesting things to tell you."

"Some other time," said Cicely ruthlessly. "I don't want you now."

"Oh, please —" began the boy, "please, Nuts —"

"Cicely!" said Roger, coming into the room. "May I speak to you a minute, please?"

Cicely stiffened. "I am engaged with Mr. Maddox," she said.

"So I see," answered Roger in a constrained voice, "but Dr. Davidson has come, to see you and to take Mrs. Davidson home, and I wish you would ask them both to stay to dinner."

"That's impossible, Roger," said Cicely. "We aren't going to have any dinner."

"Cicely!" protested Roger. "There's food enough in that dining-room for a regiment. What are we going to eat ourselves?"

"It's one thing," said Cicely decisively, "for us to snatch a sandwich and a cup of tea, and another to offer a dinner of that kind to guests. I simply can't impose

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on Hitty to the extent of inviting people now, Roger. It's out of the question."

"I'm afraid you'll have to," said Roger stubbornly, "because I've already told them you would."

Cicely, with a low exclamation of anger, moved rapidly into the hall, the boy following uncomfortably. Dr. and Mrs. Davidson stood at the farther end, evidently trying to keep up a detached and impersonal conversation. They turned at the sound of her skirts, Dr. Davidson pleased and jovial, his wife pale with constraint.

"Well, well, Mrs. Ford!" said the genial doctor, coming forward to take Cicely's hand in his warm grasp. "What a time you've kept me waiting! I'll have you dismissed from the Department if you're going to treat me like this: it's *lèse-majesté*."

Cicely met his look with eyes full of affection, but turned at once to confront his wife. "Mrs. Davidson," she said, in a cold, clear voice, "Mr. Maddox is going to stay to dinner, and Roger would like you to stay too. Will you?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Ford," said Mrs. Davidson, her look of indecision vanishing at Cicely's tone,—"I think I cannot. Come, Henry."

"Mrs. Davidson!" cried Roger, hurrying forward. "Won't you stay, please?"

"Yes, yes, let's stay!" said the kind-eyed doctor, looking in distressed bewilderment from one overstrung woman to the other. "Why not, Sarah?"

"Roger wishes it, Mrs. Davidson," said Cicely, with the hint of a taunt in her voice.

"I think," said Mrs. Davidson, "I have already done as much to-day — for Roger — as I can. We will go, Henry." She gathered her wrap about her, and went out with quiet dignity.

Roger turned to Cicely, his steady eyes ablaze with anger and pain. "Since my friends are not going to dine, I will not either," he said. "Good night to you both." He faced about sharply, and strode away to his study, shutting the door.

The boy, left alone with Cicely, looked at her with embarrassed constraint. "I suppose I'd better go too," he said, half-heartedly.

Cicely started with a little shiver, and brought her eyes back from the study door to his face. "Oh, yes, go, — go, Boy!" she said. "There won't be any dinner here to-night." She gave him her cold hand, and watched him absently while he fumbled at the catch of the outer door, and clicked it shut again behind him. Then she brought her eyes slowly back to the closed door of the study.

"I meant it for a new beginning," she said to herself, shivering. "And where — where — is it going to end?"

VIII

AN IDYL IN MUD AND SPLINTERS

IT was Cicely's first intention to breakfast in her room, and remain invisible until Roger had left the house; and indeed she felt spiritually sick with unhappiness, anger, and unadmitted guilt. But she knew that she had dealt him a blow too deep to be passed over, and the knowledge that there must be a battle made her eager for it even while it terrified her. The end was that impatience prevailed over dread, and a little after the usual time she presented herself at the table, high-strung and feverish.

Roger, who was already breakfasting, rose, seated her, and returned to his own seat, in silence. He had put a strong guard upon himself, and did not mean to speak if he could avoid it. Cicely, frightened by his white, stern face, got a new realisation of impending danger, and tried for a little to follow his example; but silence, at all times difficult for her, was impossible in a moment of tension like this, and soon she flung all caution aside in a burst of nervous speech.

“Oh, Roger! how *can* you sit there like a stone statue?” she cried. “Say it, say it, for heaven's sake, and get it over!”

Roger answered slowly, in a hard voice. "I'm afraid to. I may say too much."

"I'll say it for you, then!" said Cicely defiantly. "I've quarrelled with your Mrs. Davidson, and I'm glad! It's the best thing that has happened to me since I came. Now she can hate me as much as she pleases, and I'm free to hate her back again."

"She doesn't hate you, Cicely!" said Roger, stung. "She loved you once."

"She didn't!" flamed Cicely. "She loves *you*,—adores you,—and so she tolerated me for a little, and patronised me, and preached to me with her nose in the air. But I've had all I can stand of it, and I told her so. Let your worshipping women keep their interference for you. I am my own mistress, and I won't endure it; I tell you and her, I won't!" She ceased all pretence of eating, and the creamy lace on her breast rose and fell with the stress of her stormy breathing.

Roger, too, ceased trying to eat, and focussed his eyes upon her face in a look that was both cold and burning. "I sometimes wonder," he said slowly, "if I knew you, Cicely, when I married you."

"No, you did not!" said Cicely. "You thought you were marrying a puppet who would dance to all your tunes, and you were mistaken. There are a good many surprises in this business of matrimony."

"So it seems," said Roger bitterly. "The loss of one's friends, for instance. And the loss of one's—ideal."

"Oh, you haven't lost *her*," retorted Cicely with equal bitterness, wilfully misunderstanding. "She adores you

more than ever, now that she sees you're a martyr. Run to her house, and cheer yourself by telling her all you've suffered!"

Roger rose from the table; he had kept his balance, and saw the pitiable folly of this sort of talk. As she too rose, he stood for a moment looking down at her. Behind all the anger and pain, he loved her so! and she, how tender and pure and sweet she shone even through this ugly mist of wrath and recrimination! They stood a yard apart,—they who had been so ineffably one in flesh and spirit,—and were sundered one from the other by a thousand miles of misery. And yet, even now, one little word — one little kiss —

But the perverse, malignant genius who rules these crises had the situation well in hand. In her hurried dressing, Cicely, afire with angry revolt, had chanced upon the boy's little pin, and had snapped it on in instant defiance of Mrs. Davidson. Now, as she stood gathering herself for another outburst, her fingers played with it unconsciously, twisting it among the laces it held: and Roger's eyes inevitably fastened upon it. His hands clenched, and his jaw set again; the moment of rainbow possibilities was past.

"One thing I must say, Cicely,—" he began, and stopped.

"Well, say it!" taunted Cicely. "Don't mind me! Mrs. Davidson is an angel, and I am a devil — is that it?"

Roger grew a shade whiter; she tried him sorely. Nevertheless, having determined to speak, he drove himself on. "It's about — Maddox," he said. "I wish you

would not see him. He's getting a bad reputation; he has been very wild since — since — these last few weeks. He's not a fit companion for you." He spoke harshly. The subject was hateful to him; constantly aware of his jealousy of the boy, he had more than once choked back the name when it was upon his lips, and now that he had forced himself to mention it, it was with a violence that startled him.

Cicely started as if she had been struck. "Roger!" she cried in a sharp voice. "What are you saying? What do you mean?"

Her excitement stabbed him into a new torture of jealousy, and he answered fiercely. "What I say!" he exclaimed. "I want you to keep away from him, — do you understand? I want your friendship broken off, — to-day — this minute."

Cicely grew white to the lips. "Mrs. Davidson told you to say that," she said, in a strangled voice.

"What if she did?" retorted Roger. "She is my friend, — my only one, I begin to think."

"And you listen — to what another woman — says of your wife, —" said Cicely, choking. "And come here — and repeat it to me —"

"I do; I repeat it," said Roger, his excitement mounting in step with hers. "I want your friendship with him to end; I will not have you dragged through scandal!"

"You — you say this to me!" gasped Cicely, staring at him with dilated eyes; and suddenly she flung out her arms in a wild gesture. "Oh, it's intolerable!" she cried. "Oh, it's horrible, horrible! Roger — Roger —"

For a moment they stared at each other in a ghastly

silence, a thousand devils of anger, jealousy, passionate love and hate struggling almost palpably between them. Then Roger, gritting his teeth together, turned away. "I must go, quickly!" he muttered; and with the words the door closed hard behind him.

§

Cicely, hastily dressed for the street, hurried through the campus at a pace that was almost a run. She was blind with emotion,—rage, resentment, and a pain so keen that it was like pleasure. Nothing had ever stirred the depths of her as this last scene with Roger had done. The excitement under which they had both laboured, his vehemence that was born of reluctance and looked like fury, combined to make her think his prohibition an act of distrust and tyranny, instead of the simple warning he had meant it to be; and, as in all pure and proud women, her instinct demanded fiercely that her dealings with men be inviolate, *sans peur et sans reproche*. The intrusion of another woman between them in such a matter made the blow one which few men could comprehend, and no woman endure. "Oh, how could he, how could he!" she cried over and over, beneath her breath. "Oh, it's unthinkable! It's not to be borne!"

Inevitably, as she raged, she passed from blind passion to blind defiance; and the first impulse of her defiance was towards the boy. Her intention to seek him must have been born before she was consciously aware of it, for when she collected her thoughts she found herself hurrying steadily towards the grey old chapel, the

place to which, at this hour, he must of necessity be bound. The bell stopped ringing as she came within sight of it, and the last dark cluster of boys drifted inside the Gothic door; but she still hastened on, unshaken in her determination: and just at the corner of the chapel she met him face to face.

Late as he was, he was strolling along, hands in pockets, as if haste were a thing he had never heard of. His battered campus hat was pushed back on his dark head, and his handsome, charming face looked reckless and sullen. He was singing, noisily, grim words to a rollicking tune that smote oddly against the Doxology just rising in the chapel,—

“Then drink till you’re blind, boys,
The devil walks behind, boys,
With a drag-net for your souls!”—

but as he saw Cicely he broke off his song, caught his hat from his head, and swept her a deep bow.

“Hail, Lady of the Woodland Ways!” he called.
“How’s the weather in Arcady?”

Cicely, even while she waved her hand in a gay, wild gesture of greeting, recognised in him the same defiant excitement with which she was filled. She ran to meet him. “I’ve moved out of Arcady for good, thank you!” she cried.

“Same here,” said the boy. “What’s your address now, Nuts?”

“Oh, now I’m living in the mud and slush of the every-day world!” answered Cicely.

“How d’you like it?” inquired the boy.

"Oh, I love it," said she. "Come, let's go where it's thicker; this place stifles me."

"I'm with you," rejoined the boy. "Mud's my element at present,—much more than chapel." And, turning away from the beckoning door, he hurried with her down the wide mall and out to the gate at the farthest edge of the campus. "Here you are!" he exclaimed. "Slush enough to drown in; mud enough to be buried in. What shall we do?" He looked around with restless eyes, eager for excitement.

Cicely too looked eagerly around. Now that she had publicly asserted her defiance by joining the boy, she was full of a wild elation; she felt irresponsible as a bubble, reckless as a flame; she had cast aside all prudence and discretion. "Oh, anything! anything we shouldn't!" she cried. "Come, let's hunt for mischief!" And she ran out of the gate and down the country road, the boy at her heels.

On this side the campus outran the town and abutted on the open country; and across the road, at a little distance, was the place Mrs. de Mullen had chosen for her building enterprise. It had been a lovely and idyllic spot,—a sloping meadow set with boulders, a grove of pines, a little girdling brook. Now masons, carpenters and artisans of all kinds had turned it into a jumble of miscellaneous débris; trees had been felled, rocks uprooted, half-finished walls set starkly up; and to complete the havoc and insure the flashing of the finished result with sufficient glitter upon the public eye, the whole had been surrounded by a high board fence of almost incredible ugliness.

Cicely's eyes fell on this barricade, and lighted at once. "Let's go over to the shottoe," she cried, "and drop a card on the Duchesse Desmoulins! I'm sure we should find something there for little helping hands to do."

"To be sure!" said the boy. "Let's fresco the fence. It's an opportunity no true artist would miss."

"What a delicious idea!" exclaimed Cicely. "It would make Mrs. Davidson's hair stand on end. I'll race you to it, Pancakes."

They ran forthwith along the muddy road, splashing right and left, until they reached the aperture in the fence where the workmen went in and out. Here they paused, reconnoitred, and slipped cautiously inside; and in a moment emerged triumphant, bearing a bucket of black paint and two brushes. Both were flushed and bright-eyed now with the spirit of dare-devil adventure.

"Let's do her a coat-of-arms!" said Cicely. "I offered once to help her compose one. Let's have a lozenge-shaped shield, with a diamond rampant—"

"And a cough-drop couchant—" said the boy.

"And a crow-bar potent, to indicate the origin—" said she.

"And a coronet, to show the present elevation—" added he.

"And a motto — oh, give me a piece of paper and a pencil, Pancakes!" cried Cicely. "This is going to be a masterpiece." She sketched hastily on the back of a letter produced from the boy's pocket. "On a ground or (that's the fence), a lozenge sable (too bad we couldn't find any paint but black), quartered with coronets, cough-drops, diamonds, and — see those turned-down crescents?

those are haughty sneers. Now for the legend,—what shall we make it?"

"Something aspiring," said the boy. "'Ad astra per aspera.'"

"No, that's too impersonal," objected Cicely. "It ought to be more definite. *Ex Hibernia in Galliam*—how's that?"

"Out of Ireland into France"—that's bully!" said the boy. "Only she won't know what you mean by it."

"No, so she won't," agreed Cicely. "We must use a soup-song of French,—as the French say." She reflected in silence for a minute, pinching her lip; then, with a triumphant cry, exclaimed, "*Pas à pas, de pastilles à pâte!*"

"Oh, my eye, Nuts!" cried the boy. "It's a master-stroke! Rough on the diamonds, but a pippin of an epigram. I wish I could blazon it in rainbow tints across the arch of heaven; but since I haven't time for that, here goes with the paint! After all, that was good enough for Michelangelo." He set to work vigorously on one side of the gate, and Cicely, plunging whole-heartedly into the enterprise, followed his lead and reproduced the design on the other.

When it was done, they both stood back and surveyed their work with admiration. The embellishments were rather vague in outline, and the paint, applied over-generously, had run down in many black streaks and rivulets, but the sentiment stood forth large and legible for all who ran to read. The boy seized Cicely's hand and wrung it in congratulation.

"That's a triumph, Nuts!" he exclaimed. "They

stand up like the Roman Aqueduct. Nobody can go within half a mile and not see them."

"Glorious!" agreed Cicely. "This is a proud day for the noble House of de Mullen, and we're public benefactors to give it so much free advertising. What shall we do next?"

The boy looked up and down the street, and back at Cicely. "What should you say to a joy ride?" he suggested.

"I'd say, lead me to it!" said Cicely promptly.

"Come on, then!" said the boy; and, catching her hand, he ran with her to the farther corner of the fence, and indicated with a sweeping gesture a restless horse tethered to a tree, and a wagon containing plumbers' supplies.

"Finger of Providence," he said. "We don't know what to do, and neither does this horse; and the wicked plumber, who ought to be minding his wagon, is off plumbing and plundering an honest man. Hop in, Nuts."

"You're inspired, Pancakes!" declared Cicely. "I never should have thought of anything half so thrilling as kidnapping a plumber's wagon."

"You haven't got my cause for inspiration," said the boy, pulling off the horse's blanket and rolling it into a ball. "When you're in a fix like mine, perhaps you'll rise to equal heights. You may have heard how I've distinguished myself lately,—yes? thought likely;—well, at the present moment I'm due in the Dean's office to show just cause why I shouldn't be fired. Hence my

adaptability. It's in these exigencies, Nuts, that we show what we are really made of."

"Oh, well, my experience may not be as limited as you think," said Cicely, in a voice that reflected the bitterness of his. "How do you know you're the only crisis-jumper? Just wait till the next time we need an inspiration, and see if I don't show some knack."

"Oh, is it that way?" said the boy, looking at her curiously. "Come on, then! Go it while you're young!" And, stuffing the blanket under the seat, he pulled Cicely up into the wagon, gathered the reins, and laid the whip across the horse's back with a wild yodelling whoop.

"Gracious, this is exciting!" exclaimed Cicely, clutching the seat with both hands as they crashed along the street. "Coaching through the Alps is nothing to it. Look out for that tree, Pancakes!"

"Oh, we haven't begun to hit the pace yet!" rejoined the boy, slewing round a corner on two wheels. "Wait till we get warmed up, and transmit some inspiration to this blooded charger. We'll show 'em—eh, Bucephalus?" He flicked the horse again, and that responsive animal, frisky with standing in the cold, jumped forward so impetuously that the adventurers' feet flew up in front of them.

They were now well away from the village, on the long road known as "the old turn-pike," which linked town to town straight across the state. No vehicles were in sight; it was out of season for automobiles, and the milkmen had long since made their morning journey.

Cicely looked at the long clear stretch ahead of them, took the whip from the boy's hand, and plied it expertly.

"Here's your chance, Bucephalus!" she said. "Just look ahead of you, and show what you're made of!"

"Right you are, Nuts!" cried the boy. "A two-mile speedway, and not a soul in sight. Hit her up, old Hide-rack! Put some pep in it!"

The horse, fired by this encouragement, dashed ahead with streaming mane and tail, the wagon rocked and swayed, and the mud splashed generously. The boy stood up, and, seizing the whip again, waved it over his head and shouted, "Yoicks, tally-ho! Watch us blaze a way to glory! Hop to it, old Willow-plumes!"

"Sit down, Pancakes!" exclaimed Cicely, clutching his coat. "You'll lose your balance and fall out, and then where will you be?"

"In the gutter, where I belong!" said the boy. "I couldn't be in any worse hole, so why not try 'em all? Shows my versatility — how many kinds of a fool I can be. Go it, Pegasus!"

The defiant bitterness of his tone made Cicely glance quickly at his face. "You *are* foolish," she said soberly. "Think of your cutting chapel, and losing your chance with the Dean, for a piece of folly like this!"

"Well, how much better off are you?" retorted the boy. "You're rooted to the path of prudence and duty, I suppose? Come off, Nuts! It's a case of pot and kettle."

"Why, so it is!" cried Cicely, relapsing into recklessness. "All right then, I'm with you. This is stupid;

come, let's get off the road, and have a little excitement!" She stood up too, swaying perilously, and waved her hand towards the rolling country around them.

"That's the idea!" approved the boy. "We'll try a turn at steeple-chasing." Veering sharply, he drove the astonished horse across the shallow ditch by the roadside and straight into the open field beyond. "Here's your chance, Pegasus, to get back to Nature!" he urged.

The frozen ground was furrowed from last year's cultivation, and the boy and Cicely both staggered as the wagon lurched over the bumps; but by some miracle they kept their footing, and drove safely across the first field, and through a gap in the low stone wall that bounded it. In the second field, however, the ground rose abruptly to a knoll in the middle, and then fell away as sharply towards the boundary on the other side; and here the horse, unaccustomed to such vicissitudes in his usual peaceful life of plumber's assistant, began to show symptoms of balking. The boy, his eyes bright with devil-may-care excitement, plied the whip and urged him on. "Up with you!" he cried. "Charge, Chester, charge! What, you wouldn't be daunted by a mole-hill like this? Look at Nuts and me, how gallantly we take our ups and downs!"

"They'll be more downs than ups before long!" said Cicely, swaying, as they crossed the brow of the little hill and began to plunge forward. "Look out, Pancakes,—there's a stone wall just in front of us — oh, look out!"

"Let the stone wall look out for us!" shouted the

boy. "Come, we'll try hurdling. Spread your wings, Pegasus! One, two, three, and at 'em! Watch the birdmen!"

Cracking his whip, he lifted the horse to the jump. The noble steed rose with a lunge, dashed the wagon against the wall with a splintering shock, and hung kicking in the shafts for a moment. Then, wrenching himself free of the wrecked harness, he turned away without even a sign of farewell, and trotted briskly back towards Cheltenham.

Cicely and the boy, who had both described sudden semicircles out of the wagon, sat up in the muddy field and gazed at one another. By the interposition of that Providence which succours the intoxicated and the insane, they had both escaped injury, barring a bruise or two; and, mud-plastered and dazed into speechlessness, they stared from each other to the wrecked wagon and the departing horse, and back to each other again. Then, the situation fully realized, with one accord they burst into laughter.

"Oh, Nuts!" cried the boy. "How are the mighty fallen! You soared down from your perch like a shooting star. Have you all your bones?"

"All,—and a few more that are strangers to me," gasped Cicely, convulsed. "I can feel four hundred and twelve of them — standing up on end. Well,—that was sudden, Pancakes! Even the sun never set so quickly."

"You — you gave a little sputter," exploded the boy, "and then you went up like a rocket,— and came down like the stick. And old Pegasus remembered an engagement with the Cheltenham Muses,— and the plumber-

wagon repented of its sins, and turned into a respectable pile of junk,— and your hat, and my hat, and the tools, and the pieces of lead pipe,— O where are they? ”

“ Ask of the winds, that far and wide with fragments strewed the sea! ” cried Cicely. “ It was a noble cataclysm. A little more, and we’d have spilled out our immortal souls.”

“ Mine was gone already,” said the boy, rather grimly. “ Well, Nuts, what now? It’s your turn to get an inspiration.”

“ So it is,” said Cicely. “ Well, the first one that comes to me is that we might as well leave this flowery bed of ease before we dissolve in the mud,— if we can.” She stretched her limbs gingerly, and scrambled slowly to her feet, while the boy, on his side of the wagon, did the same. “ So far, so good,” said she. “ Now then, let’s consider. Lost in the desert; noon coming on; five miles from luncheon, and a wagon to drag. Have you any money? ”

“ A nice fat cheque-book,” grinned the boy.

“ Exactly,” said Cicely. “ And I’ve got a nickel in my coat-pocket. Our faces are our fortunes. What do you say to begging from door to door? ”

“ Me for the pike! ” replied the boy promptly. “ That’s a bully idea. You’re a credit to your crisis, Nuts.”

“ And you’re a coadjutor worth having,” said Cicely. “ Here goes, then. We don’t need much make-up; our whole morning has been one steady preparation for this solemn moment.” She surveyed herself and her companion in detail, nodding her approval: indeed they were a striking contrast to the aristocratic young couple who had

left the campus at ~~chz̄t~~ ¹⁻¹ me,— hatless, dishevelled, spattered with black paint and coated with mud from top to toe. "We might add a finishing touch or two, just to make us feel festive," she decided. "Let's change coats, and put them on inside out; and I want your overshoes, please; and you put on the horse-blanket,— it's still under the seat. Let me take your knife. Now rub your hands over your face,— on your nose,— so. Oh, you're perfect! Oh, I wish I could look half as disreputable as you!"

"You'll do very well, Nuts!" cried the boy, laughing hilariously. "My eye! the squirrels would run you out of town. I wish I had your picture! You look like an insane lady thug,— refined, but desperate!"

Laughing at each other, they began to plod across the rough field towards the nearest farmhouse. Cicely had tied on the boy's overshoes with string, cut off the finger-tips of her neat gloves, and pinned up her trig skirt here and there so that it hung in disreputable scallops; with his coat turned wrong-side-out and the collar pinned together under her chin, she made a fantastic figure of destitution. The boy, draped in his plaid blanket, with his smudged face peering from under his tousled hair, and his amethyst necktie tied in a bow on the top of his head, looked like the aboriginal ancestor of all ragamuffins. They were wildly gay; though each felt that his own laughter rang hollow, each laughed the louder in the hope of deceiving the other and himself.

"Now," directed Cicely, "I'm going to do the talking, and all you have to do is to look hungry and piteous. Answer 'Yes, kind sir,' or 'God bless you, lady,' if any

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one speaks to you; and smack your lips anxiously at regular intervals."

"You're a great general, Nuts!" said the boy. "I'll back you to provide a Ritz-Carlton spread in two minutes, or to get the dogs set on us in one. This is the best lark yet; come, let's hop to it!"

At the first house they tried, no one was at home; at the second, a nervous woman, peering out between half-closed shutters, threatened to shoot them for sneak-thieves; at the third they were informed that there was nothing to eat, and that if there had been it would not be for jail-birds and tramps. They greeted each rebuff with a fresh access of giggles: but a feeling of panic was stealing up on Cicely; the bubble-like elation was wearing away, and she was conscious of the real world crowding close, ready to clutch her. Suddenly she began to run, as if by speed she could escape from fear; and the boy, subtly catching her mood, ran with her.

The next house was a forlorn affair, set close to the roadside and visibly lacking in shingles and windowpanes. They rushed into its straggling path, and, following faint sounds of movement, came soon to a little yard at the back. Here a rosy Irishwoman,—sleeves rolled up from chapped, brick-red arms,—was hanging out an enormous basket of steaming clothes. As the two beggars came to a sudden stop in front of her, she lifted a wide face and greeted them cheerily.

"Good-day to yez!" she said. "'Tis fine weather it is, fer the time o' year!"

"Yes, indeed," returned Cicely, surprised back into

her normal manner by the cheery friendliness of the greeting. "I hope you are enjoying it."

"Oh, I've no cause to complain," said the woman, flapping a table-cloth into place. "Summer's betther fer dhryin', but winther's the time fer hangin' over the tubs."

"Do you *always* wash?" asked Cicely. "The whole year round?"

"When I've me health," said the woman cheerfully. "There's whiles the rheumatiz gits me, an' I have to set an' take me batin'; but mostly I do four of 'em a wake, reg'lar. Glory be, there's always washin' a-plenty."

"Do you like it?" inquired Cicely, interested in this new method of keeping boredom at bay.

"I like to see me childhren ate," said the woman laconically. Then, with a shake of her broad shoulders, "An' what am I doin'," she demanded, "talkin' of atin' to hungry wans like yez, an' niver offerin' yez a bite? Poor lambs! 'Tis manny a mile ye've thramped since food passed yer lips, I'm thinkin'. An' by the grace o' God we've bread an' pitaties to-day enough fer all that should come, if they wasn't too manny." She wiped her hands on her apron, and turned to go into the house.

"Oh, no!" protested Cicely; and the boy broke in, "Please don't bother! — we don't want anything, truly —"

"Whisht!" said the woman, with kindly peremptoriness. "Don't I know what it is to go hungry? Hold yer nonsense, an' shtand there till I come," She bustled into the house, nodding and smiling.

Cicely and the boy avoided each other's eyes. They

wanted desperately to keep up the pretence of gay adventure, and how was it possible in the face of such simple reality as this? They could not even laugh, but stood tongue-tied and uncomfortable, each acutely aware of the other's distress.

In a moment the woman reappeared, bearing two great slabs of bread and two cold boiled potatoes. Her broad face beamed with pleasure. "There!" she said. "Take it an' welcome! Thank God the time's past when I can't give food to the hungry. No, I say *take* it! It only manes a thrifle less of pitacies at dinner, an' we've that much bread it's shouldherin' us out o' the house. It'll nourish me jest to think o' yez wid somethin' inside ye. What good would me food do me if I niver shared it?"

The fine sincerity of her giving silenced their protestations, and made them accept her bounty humbly. Cicely, on first impulse, had unfastened a jewelled brooch to offer in return, but a finer instinct prompted her not to affront this gracious hospitality, and she gave only thanks. They took their food, and slipped away in shamed silence.

Now the bubble of false mirth was broken for good and all. Neither of them could talk, and as for the springs of laughter, they were dried. Presently the boy stopped in the middle of the road, took off the ridiculous blanket, and flung it into the bushes.

"What's the use!" he said. "The jig's up. It's time to pay the piper."

Cicely, with a smothered sob, knelt by the wayside and crumbled the food where she hoped the birds might

garner it. In silence, and without a gleam of mirth, they undid the silly preparations for their prank, and resumed as nearly as possible their daily semblance. Then, speechlessly and drearily, they trudged side by side the long miles back to the town.

§

When Cicely returned, weary in mind and body, to the little red house; she found Roger just upon the point of leaving it. He stared in astonishment at her pallor and disarray; he had supposed her at some luncheon party in festal raiment.

“Where have you been?” he asked.

“In the country,” said Cicely; adding defiantly, as a flash of her morning’s spirit shot up again, “with Mr. Maddox.”

Roger’s face darkened, but he spoke as quietly as usual. “Has Maddox returned?” he asked.

“Certainly; with me,” said Cicely.

“That’s fortunate,” said Roger, and moved towards the door.

“Why?” asked Cicely sharply.

“Because he’s wanted at a meeting of the Discipline Committee,” said Roger. “You’ve seen your last of Maddox, I fancy, in Cheltenham.” He went out, closing the door quickly.

Cicely, struck by his tone, forced herself to reflect. The Discipline Committee met only when there was a question of expulsion to be considered; the boy was then in a situation even more dangerous than he had told her. If the news of these last pranks reached the committee

before its meeting was over, his doom would be sealed beyond redemption: if not, he might pull through on the strength of his former good record. She saw clearly enough now what she had been too wilfully blind to see in the morning, that but for her he would have never strayed from the path of duty, either now or in those earlier lapses at which Roger had hinted; and with a shock of remorse it came to her that if he were ruined, his ruin would be at her door.

The thought was a spur to her tired faculties. She glanced at the clock. It was quarter before three; Roger had just gone, the meeting then was at three o'clock; she had fifteen minutes in which to repair to-day's damages. In feverish haste she ran out to the main street, found a cab, and set forth at all the speed her urging could inject into the sleepy horse and lethargic driver.

However, it is one thing to create a liberal amount of disaster in a brief time, and another thing to repair it in a briefer. She found the plumber well informed of the cause of his misfortune, and brick-red with ill-suppressed profanity; the boy had already endeavoured, over the telephone, to placate him with liberal offers of damages, and had only succeeded in infuriating him to the point of going to the Dean in person with his complaint; and now Cicely's further overtures fanned his rage until he threatened to get a policeman and send both her and the boy to jail. She soon gave him up in despair, and, wringing her hands with impatience, drove to Mrs. de Mullen's; but here too the news had preceded her, and her card elicited from the English butler the uncomprom-

ising statement that his mistress was "hout,"— not even "not at 'ome," a fine distinction in definiteness which Cicely perceived through all her agitation. And the time was passing: the boy's fate was even now being settled; she had led him into trouble, and all avenues of reparation were closed to her. She wrung her hands again.

Then an idea flashed upon her with the suddenness of an inspiration. She would go to his accusers, and plead his cause in person: she would save him yet! She stopped long enough in front of Mrs. de Mullen's temporary abode to pencil a hurried word of confession, and entrusted it to the haughty butler; then, urging her driver to his utmost exertions, she set her face eagerly towards the campus and the scene of the tribunal.

The Discipline Committee met in the Dean's office, at the end of the old red Executive Building. Cicely knocked on the door with a hand that trembled with excitement. Inside, she could hear Roger's voice, speaking steadily in its usual quiet tone: and, with the thought that she had come here to oppose and defy him openly, the elated, unreal feeling of the morning returned upon her. Her fatigue was gone, burned up in a flame of impatient eagerness. She knocked again, unable to bear a moment's delay.

The Dean himself came to open the door,— a tall, spare man, keen-eyed, grey-haired, and severe. He looked at her in astonishment.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Ford?" he asked.
"Have you lost your way?"

"No, I intended to come here," answered Cicely. "May I come in, please? I have something to say."

While the Dean stood trying to find polite words for the hesitation that appeared in his face, she slipped quickly past him, and entered the office. It was a large room, panelled in oak, lined with books and files of records, and lighted by high, unshaded windows; the centre of the floor was filled by a great desk, whose chair the Dean had just vacated, and around which sat seven pre-occupied men. They all turned and stared at Cicely, too much amazed at her intrusion to rise,—all except Roger, who started to his feet with a white face, exclaiming, "Cicely! What is it? Is anything wrong?"

Cicely looked them all over with cool and steady eyes, gleaming with defiance. Here were seven strong men met to crush hope and happiness out of one slip of a boy; and she,—no more than a girl herself,—the only one to defend him! Her breast swelled, and she faced them, all soiled and tumbled as she was, like a young Amazon queen.

"Keep your seats, by all means, gentlemen!" she said scornfully. "Yes, a great deal is wrong. You are here in your might to judge a boy for a number of little silly deeds charged to him: and I am here to tell you that he did not do them. I did."

A suppressed exclamation went through the room. Cicely's bright eyes travelled over the faces, and saw Dr. Davidson's grave and troubled, the Dean's startled but sceptical, Dr. Reynolds' ironically alert, the others aghast. She was filled with triumphant satisfaction;

what a stir she— even she, slender and alone,— could cause among these learned men! It was stimulating and delightful. She felt as if she were made of some volatile vapour that could ride on the wings of the wind, could blow in the eyes of these stupid people and blind them, or mock them by sailing away through the window.

Roger, very white, stood gripping the back of his chair. "You don't mean what you say, Cicely!" he exclaimed. "It's a mistake,— surely it's a mistake!"

"Oh, not at all!" said Cicely. "I'll prove it, if you wish. The plumber's wagon, for instance,— you'll find it, in pieces, in a field at the right-hand side of the road, about five miles from town, at the foot of a little hill. And the de Mullens' fence,— you've heard about that? Well, here is the design, just as I sketched it." She fished in the pockets of her coat and brought out the envelope the boy had given her, with her drawing on its back. "Any one who wishes can identify the criminal's thumbprints," she added lightly.

The committee-men moved uncomfortably, intensely ill at ease. Roger's fingers opened and closed on the chair-back, pressing it until their tips were white. Cicely's gleaming eyes challenged the tribunal; and Dr. Reynolds, stirred, as always, into hostile admiration, responded to their challenge.

"Allow me to examine the evidence, if you please!" he said, smiling satirically. "This conflict of testimony is interesting." He held out his hand for the letter, and Cicely surrendered it with a fleeting look of surprise.

"I hardly follow you, Mrs. Ford," said the Dean, in

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his dry, deliberate voice. " You say that you are responsible for the transgressions against personal property committed this morning; but Mr. Maddox has just stated, before us all, that he was the perpetrator."

" That's a mistake," said Cicely quickly. " I painted on Mrs. de Mullen's fence, and I stole the plumber's wagon. I want that clearly understood."

" It is extremely difficult to understand," returned the Dean, " in view of the exactly contrary statement that has just been made."

" Nevertheless it is true," insisted Cicely. " I did it."

" Then how," inquired Dr. Reynolds, holding up the envelope with a caustic smile, " do you account for the fact that this is addressed ' Grant Maddox, Esquire '?"

Cicely flushed a shade deeper with anger. " It is Mr. Maddox' property, to be sure," she answered, " but I happened to have it in my possession."

" Ah!" said he. " Is it your habit to keep custody of Mr. Maddox' belongings?" and his sharp glance travelled with daring malice to the little pin which she still wore on the front of her frock.

The Dean rose brusquely, and opened a door at the back of the room. " Mr. Maddox!" he said. " Kindly step in here. Mr. Reynolds, with your permission, we will confine ourselves to the matter in hand; it is all that concerns us."

The boy came quickly through the door of the anteroom. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face sullenly defiant. At sight of Cicely he started and flushed hotly, but said nothing. Dr. Reynolds, very angry at the rebuke he had received, looked on with a sneer. Roger

glanced from Cicely to the boy with eyes that gleamed startlingly in the haggard whiteness of his face.

"Mr. Maddox," said the Dean, "I believe you told us that you, and you alone, were responsible for the offences of this morning that have been reported to us?"

"I did, sir," said the boy quickly.

"It's not true!" cried Cicely.

"One moment, Mrs. Ford," said the Dean, with a slight gesture. "Mr. Maddox, I understood you to say that you were alone when these offences were committed."

"So I was, sir!" said the boy steadily. "I stand by what I said."

"O Boy, how can you?" exclaimed Cicely. "Why, I was with him — Dean Graves — Roger — Dr. Davidson — I was with him from the minute he left the chapel door! I made him break his appointment — I made him paint the fence — I — I — oh, I'm the *only* one to blame! Believe me, please believe me!"

"Don't, Nuts!" begged the boy. "I've told them everything that matters; they know it's all my fault. Don't you bother about it; I don't want you to be bothered! Please don't!" He moved nearer to her in his earnestness, his brown eyes alight with a devotion which he had no thought of hiding; and now his sullenness was all gone, and his face was boyish and sweet.

The men looked at each other, and looked away in the extreme of embarrassment.

"This is a peculiar situation," remarked the Dean,— red with discomfort, but striving for a facetious manner; he was an intensely conventional man. "This office has often held two people who were trying to evade a fault;

but to see two endeavouring to claim the same one is new to my experience."

"A very touching moment!" gibed Dr. Reynolds.
"Fit material for a poet!"

Dr. Davidson leaned forward in his chair, and cleared his throat sharply. "I don't see anything so unusual about this!" he said, in a voice of excessive cheerfulness. "Two good friends are loyally trying to get each other out of a scrape, that's all. It's very easy to change the complexion of matters a trifle under such circumstances; — often been in the same boat myself. Why need we detain Mrs. Ford any longer? I move we thank her for her trouble, and depute Mr. Ford to take her home; we have a quorum without him."

"Well said, Mr. Davidson!" said the Dean, with obvious relief. "If all are in favour, let us act on this suggestion. No objections? Mrs. Ford, we thank you; Mr. Ford, we release you from further attendance. After all, gentlemen, to-day's happenings hardly matter; we have enough material of an earlier date to proceed upon."

Roger, his forehead beaded with perspiration, sprang forward with an eagerness which showed the intensity of his suffering. "Thank you, Dean Graves! Thank you, Dr. Davidson!" he said. "Let's go, Cicely."

But Cicely was looking around her with fiercely shining eyes. She knew well enough that she was being packed off to save a difficult situation, and was hot with anger; Roger's eagerness added fuel to the flame, and Dr. Reynolds' malicious smile maddened her. On top of all came the Dean's sinister allusion to the boy's probable

fate, and the hungry eyes of the boy himself fixed on her face, wakening the mother-instinct of defence within her.

"I will not go," she cried vehemently, "and leave this boy to shoulder blame that belongs to me! I *will* speak the truth, however you make eyes at each other! I am to blame, I alone. I was at the bottom of all that he did this morning; and whatever he did before,—I don't know what it was,—he would have done none of it but for me. I am the only one responsible. Did he ever get into trouble before these last two months? No,—you have to say it,—never until he met me. I tell you I am to blame for it all. I have been his bad spirit — his — how do you say it — evil genius? — I —"

"Nuts!" interrupted the boy, seizing her hand. "Stop it! I won't have it! You, to talk like this! — Why, it's absurd, it's preposterous! You — why, you're an angel! You're all that is beautiful."

"This is very interesting," said the Dean, twisting his long dry body in misery at the obvious imminence of a scandal,—"but really, Mrs. Ford,—really, I think it is beside our issue. We have to deal with Mr. Maddox on grounds in which you could not possibly be concerned,—grounds quite unfit for a lady's consideration. I must ask you, I think — I really must ask you —"

"Cicely!" said Roger, in a voice that made them all start, "are you coming with me?"

Cicely stared slowly around the tribunal. The faces of the kindly older men,—all gentlemen, all scholars, all good friends,—were turned away from her in constrained distress. Dr. Reynolds alone looked at her, with an open

sneer on his handsome features. The boy had gone to the window, and stood staring out in blank despair. Roger, his face like marble, compelled her with his blazing eyes.

"Oh, what a waste of breath!" she cried desperately. "You're all deaf when I speak. Very well, I'll be dumb. Good-bye, Boy; they're all against us. Good-bye; I'll go."

§

The campus was full of people. Cicely seared Roger with the flame of her look, but could not speak to him; and he kept his eyes straight in front of him, afraid to trust them to meet hers. So, silent except when the passing of some friend forced a greeting from them, they marched starkly side by side, armed enemies, back to the little house where so lately they had been laughing lovers.

Once inside the door, Cicely turned upon him in a blaze of passion which scorched her from head to foot. "Do you call yourself my husband?" she flashed at him.

Roger faced her, trembling with an excitement no less violent than hers. "I thought I did," he answered between his teeth, "but the manner of your wifehood makes me doubt it."

"And you promised — promised at the altar — to cherish and protect me!" she cried. "Have you a dictionary of your own? did you mean 'bully' and 'insult' when you said it?"

"And you," answered Roger, white-hot, "when I wished you not to say 'obey,' you told me that, marry-

ing me, it would be your joy to say it. I have had a superb demonstration of your joyful obedience,— when you set aside my warnings and my wishes, and flout my friends, and drag my name in the gutter — that is your method of ‘obeying,’ I suppose!”

“And this is your method of enforcing obedience!” blazed Cicely; and seizing a light stick from the stand beside her, she thrust it into Roger’s hands. “Beat me! beat me!” she cried wildly. “Break me, if you can! Then our marriage will be complete,— you can ‘love and cherish’ in your own fashion, and I will be forced to ‘obey’!”

There was a snapping, crackling sound, and the stick fell in two pieces to the floor. Roger, turning violently, began to grope blindly for the door-handle. “Keep away from me, Cicely,” he said in a hoarse voice. “If I touch you now, I shall kill you.” He fumbled for a minute with the latch, wrenched it open, and banged the door shut behind him.

Cicely, hands clenched and eyes distended, stood staring at the splintered pieces of the stick at her feet; and suddenly they looked, to her dazed vision, as if they bled,— like two pieces of a life that had once been whole.

“And this is — love,” she said aloud, slowly.

IX

THE END OF THE WORLD

AFTER what seemed an eternity, Cicely lifted herself from the couch in the drawing-room and gazed about her. The terrible storm of emotion that had torn her spirit to shreds since she parted from Roger in the hall,— the tortured rage, the wild revolt, the passion of weeping,— had passed; now, exhausted, and reduced to the state where all emotion seemed one dull, illimitable ache, she tried to face reality. She felt as if she were awaking from a dream of unimaginable horrors, to a world turned upside-down and emptied of all that she had known it by. “I must think, I must think,” she kept saying to herself; and yet, in the great surrounding void of despair, there seemed nothing to think about.

All around her in the quiet room,— still fragrant with the ghosts of dead kisses,— were the ruins of her life. She looked from one accustomed object to another. There, in the corner, was the high-backed chair which Roger had twined with roses for her birthday; she remembered how he had made her sit in it, and had filled her hands with roses, and said she was the rose of the world. And there was the piano he had given her so proudly, to whose accompaniment she had so often sung

him almost to tears; once, leaning over it, he had told her that all the morning stars singing together could not make such music as hers. Even the little humble footstool had its memory; when he had first got it, at her request, he had brought it to her himself, and had set her foot upon it and kissed the little satin shoe, saying that he wished he could be the footstool for such precious feet. Such dear words, so trivial and sweet,—so unregarded! And now the lips that had seemed made only for kisses had learned to open for insults: marriage had been desecrated, holy love profaned. "Oh, Roger, Roger!" she cried out suddenly. "Oh, we loved each other so — and now — now —! O Roger — love, sweet love — your love — dead, dead, dead!"

Well, now that her eyes were opened to the truth, there was but one thing to do. Love was dead between them? Then their life together was done. She had all the fierce instinctive purity of women, antedating man-made laws of marriage and divorce, which revolts from nearness of the body when nearness of the soul is gone. Since Roger loved her no longer, she could no longer be his wife. She must leave him,—she must go away.

When she had reached her decision, she rose, took one long look about her, and turned away from the little room. Up the twisted stair she climbed blindly ("The last time! the last time!"), and stood in the bedroom to which she had come a bright bride, making ready to leave her husband's home.

§

No more anger now, no more bitterness; only heart-

break. "O Roger, Roger! Oh, I love you so, Roger! . . . O Roger — dearest, dearest — how can I go from you? . . ." She took the boy's pin from her gown, and laid it with a little shudder in an empty drawer, where it should touch nothing of hers that Roger had loved. Then, with a feeling of deathly sickness at her heart, she pulled off her wedding ring; if she could possess Roger's love and his home no longer, she could not keep the symbol of wifehood: but as she went to put it away, her courage failed her, and she slipped it on a chain and hung it around her neck; the gold, touching her warm flesh coldly, made her shiver. She crept into Roger's room, and, kneeling by his bed, kissed his pillow, sobbing softly; how many times had one pillow been enough for both of them,— the birds singing in the early, early morning,— her head upon his heart! . . . She hurried downstairs, afraid that if she did not go quickly she could not go at all. The door of Roger's study stood open, and his smoking-coat, the coat he wore when he was working, lay upon his chair. She had not meant to stop again,— but the coat, the dear old workaday coat was Roger himself! She slipped into the room and pressed her face against it, and the tears were wet and salt between her lips and the rough cloth. "Good-bye,— Badger, my Badger!" she sobbed.

In the hall Hitty met her. "Ther's a young man here—" she began; then stopped, shocked by Cicely's pale, wet face. Her eyes travelled slowly over the long dark coat and the hand-bag, and back to the wan, weeping face again. "You — you goin' away?" she stammered.

"Yes, Hitty," said Cicely in a breaking voice. "I'm going away."

"For long?" asked Hitty, growing pale herself with some nameless anxiety.

"For very long!" said Cicely with a sob. "O Hitty — for always!"

"Good land!" said Hitty; and stood speechless, her fingers working convulsively at her apron, her face very white.

"Good-bye," said Cicely, starting towards the door. She was cold now from head to foot, and moved numbly. "I must go quickly, Hitty."

Hitty put out a hard hand and touched her sleeve. "Don't ye go, Mis' Ford!" she said huskily. "Stay a spell. Don't ye go."

"I must," repeated Cicely. "Good-bye. O Hitty — good-bye — good-bye —"

Hitty leaned forward with a dry, choking sob, and kissed Cicely's wet cheek. "Good-bye, then," she said. "The Lord keep ye."

Cicely nodded at her with a white and twisted smile, looked once more with tear-blind eyes at the silent rooms of the little house, and closed the outer door behind her.

§

Outside, the fog that comes from melting snow hung thick and wet upon the twilight air. The two sentinel trees were cloaked with it, and the dead stalks where the flowers had been were beaded close. In the midst of the little lawn stood a dark figure, which Cicely, all

blinded as she was, would have passed unseeing; but at the noise of the closing door it turned, and disclosed the haggard face of the boy.

"Nuts!" he said, hurrying to her. "I wouldn't come in, because I thought your — your husband might not like to have me. It's fine of you to see me here. Why, Nuts! You look —" He broke off abruptly, staring at her altered face.

Cicely wiped the tears from her eyes, and met his gaze. He too was strangely changed from his old debonair self; his eyes were hollow, his face drawn and weary. In him, as in her, you might have searched endlessly without finding a trace of the morning's madcap gaiety. The game was played out, and the wild fire had died.

"I'm going away, Pancakes," said Cicely.

"For a long time, Nuts?" asked the boy, as Hitty had done, but without surprise.

Cicely nodded dumbly. A voice within her kept saying, like the dull ticking of a clock, "Forever, forever, forever." She looked about her, and everything was strange to her eyes,— the thick, shrouding fog, the dim light, the haggard boy, Hitty's white face gazing from the window,— all strange and dreadful, like the feeling of eternal farewell in her heart.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Cicely. "Anywhere. My life here is over."

"So is mine," said the boy. "I came to tell you."

"They've expelled you, then?" she asked listlessly. "It's all finished?"

"All finished," answered he. "All in vain, Nuts,

what you did; and I can't thank you; I can never thank you. I'm to go to-morrow, when the Faculty gets through with me.— But I won't wait," he added suddenly. "I'll go now, when you go." He took the bag from her hand, and started down the little garden-path.

Cicely walked beside him, numb and speechless. The little house, with Hitty's face at the window and Roger's dear old coat inside, tugged at her heartstrings, but she would not look back. It was to be done, and she must do it. With death in her heart, she trudged away.

"I suppose you know about the laboratory money," said the boy, breaking a long silence.

"Has it gone?" asked Cicely dully.

"Gone to Yale," said he. "It was announced to-day."

"I supposed so," said Cicely; adding drearily, half to herself, "That's what my life in Cheltenham has meant,— ruin to Roger,— ruin to you,— ruin to me. Why did I ever come?"

"Oh, Nuts!" said the boy. "What should we have done without you?"

"And what have you done with me?" returned Cicely despairingly. "Everything seems to be against me, Boy. Something ruins all that I touch."

"Don't say that, Nuts!" protested the boy. "It isn't true."

"It's true; it's true," said Cicely. "It all began so well!— and now it's all so wrecked and shattered! Everything's against me: everything."

They fell silent again, and trudged on until they came to the end of the little street and the edge of the town. Here, along a pine-bordered highway, ran the long tracks

of the electric road that gathered all the distant hamlets of the state together in a shining net. Cicely's eyes followed the black, gleaming rails until they vanished in fog and darkness. "That looks like a long, long road," she said. "I think I'll let it take me away."

"Oh, Nuts, must you go?" said the boy.

"Yes, yes," answered Cicely wearily. "I must. Don't keep me back."

He set down the bag in the snow and came close to her; and his tired, white face was as young and sweet as a child's; on him, at least, the discipline of these new experiences had not been wasted. His love for her was in his eyes, but now, purged of all his recklessness, it was a boy's love, humble, chivalrous, ethereal. He had no thought of opposing her will, or of regarding this moment in any light but that of an inevitable farewell. For a long while they gazed in silence at each other, with great eyes made tragic by the terrible eternalness of the sorrow of youth.

Then, in the distance, the car whistled, curving around the town on its way to where they stood. Cicely stirred, and gave the boy her hands.

"It's coming to take me away, Pancakes," she said.

The boy lifted the hands to his lips, kissing the rough little gloves.

"Good-bye, Nuts," he said in a smothered voice.
"Good-bye."

Something in their position, and in their isolation there beneath the trees, brought again to Cicely a memory of the day when they had first met in the woods, and she gave him a sad little smile. "You said

you'd never kiss me again until I gave you permission, Pancakes," she said. "I give it now." She raised her lips to him, pure and sisterly cold.

His lips met them as purely and coldly. "O Nuts, you know I love you," he said brokenly.

"I know," said Cicely. "Good-bye."

Around the curve of the road the car, whistling, bore down upon them; their hands pressed again and separated. In silence he helped her aboard; and stood back, watching, with blurred eyes, the slow movement of the wheels that were to take her from him.

Cicely pressed her cheek against the window. The spires of Cheltenham were shrouded thick in mist; the boy's face stood white and tragic against the dark pines; the little red house, with Roger's coat inside it, was hidden from her sight. A stab of agony pierced through and through her weary spirit. "Have I finished with life, so soon?" she asked herself; and the wheels, beginning to revolve, took up the pitiless answer, "Forever . . . forever . . . forever."

And now the end of the world had come indeed.

X

WAIF'S ASYLUM

IN the early winter morning, Cicely, huddled on a boulder in a sloping meadow, gazed at the checkered fields and sleepy farm-house spread out before her. Fresh snow had fallen during the night, and lay thick and soft on the ground and on the black branches of the trees; the house was frosted like a cake, the world was white and sparkling. It was different, amazingly different from the soiled and shrouded world she had left behind: there all was turbid, feverish misery; here, all cold, white peace. She thought apathetically of the march of emotions that had passed over her since yesterday,— of the dreary, heart-sick journey, with the car plunging through dark, deserted roads, and the wheels grinding their refrain into her soul; of the strangely desolate moment when she had been told that she could go no farther, and had clambered out alone,— she, so cherished, so lapped in warmth and tenderness! — into the empty midnight streets; of her shame and helpless anger when, with undisguised insolence, they had refused her admittance at the chief inn of the town; of the shuddering, despairing night she had finally passed at a dingier and less scrupulous hostelry. Already these experiences seemed long past and far away: and the passions and tears and

despairs of the Cheltenham days had retreated into a distance too dim for fathoming. As she huddled there in the midst of the clean, white coldness, her heart seemed frozen into an insensibility as bleak and chill as the snow.

Life had been stirring for some time in the drowsy farm-house,— a curl of smoke at the chimney, a hand at the window letting in the light,— and now, of a sudden, it burst into the full activity of day. Figures came forth, and moved about the barnyard; there were voices of animals clamouring eager greetings, and the sound of happy whistling. Cicely stirred and shivered. Down there they were all alive, cheery, full of blithe companionship: and she was so alone, so cold! Unconsciously, without being aware of any intention, she rose and moved down the snowy slope, to be a little nearer that human life and warmth.

At the edge of the barnyard she stopped, jerked suddenly back to self-consciousness. She did not want to meet strange men and women,— she, whose spirit was so bruised that it could not bear its own glance! For a moment she thought of running away; and yet she had not the courage to go back to her snowy solitude. She hung undecided on the outskirts of the cheerful activity, watching the greedy chickens pecking at their morning meal, listening to the mooing of cows and the stamp of horses' feet from the neighbouring barns; and while she lingered, the back door of the farm-house opened, and a woman stood upon the threshold, smiling out at the clean white morning.

She was a large, spare woman, with a middle-aged face

moulded in lines of tolerance and tenderness, and with capable, work-hardened hands. Singing cheerfully to herself, she shook out a gay red table-cloth; and as she sang and shook her eyes travelled brightly from point to point of the scene before her as if in affectionate greeting of a well-loved friend. In a moment they fell upon Cicely (standing half-hidden behind a wood-pile, uncertain whether to run or stay), and she dropped her hands with an exclamation of surprise.

"My soul an' body!" she said. "Who're you, dear?"

Cicely stopped in the act of turning for flight, stayed by the motherly kindness of the face and voice. "I—I don't want to trespass," she faltered. "I just stopped to—to rest a minute—I was tired—"

"Poor child!" said the woman, crossing the yard with the table-cloth gathered up on her arm. "Tired! an' hungry too, I'll bet a cookie. Ain't ye hungry, dear?"

"I don't know,—I haven't thought,—" said Cicely uncertainly, "it doesn't matter, anyway. I'm just going."

"Goin'! No, that you ain't!" said the woman, with kindly peremptoriness. "Ye look as white's a sody-cracker. Come right along with me,—right this way." She took Cicely's arm, and led her back across the dooryard and into the house.

Cicely, to her own surprise, went submissively. A moment ago every fibre of her shrank from the thought of contact with her fellow-men, but this woman's motherly kindness drew her with a power she could not disobey. From the depths of the big rocking-chair where she found

herself installed she looked vaguely about the cosy kitchen, and up into the friendly face. "Thank you," she said faintly. "It's — nice to be here."

The woman patted her shoulder with a smile. "You jest set still," she said, "an' we'll see if we can't make ye feel a little nicer yet." She bustled capably about the big stove, and very soon the odours of steaming coffee, fresh toast and crisp bacon began to float seductively through the room. The woman smiled to herself as she worked, glancing at Cicely from time to time. In a few moments, with a beaming face of hospitality, she spread a napkin on the corner of the table, laid the fragrant viands upon it, and invited her guest to "Drore up."

Cicely had paid no attention to the preparations, beyond reflecting apathetically that a kitchen was a pleasanter place than she had supposed; but now, face to face with the food and the invitation, she started, and sniffed daintily. "Why," she exclaimed, "I do believe I want something to eat!"

The woman laughed delightedly, and, seating her at the table, plied her with the good food. Cicely ate with growing appetite; it was many hours since she had thought of nourishment, and she was sorely in need of it. The woman watched her closely, and, seeing the faint colour steal back to the white cheeks and lips, glowed with pleasure. "Eat, dear, eat!" she kept urging. "Good victuals never harmed anybody, saint nor sinner. Come, one more drop o' coffee!"

"No, no, *nothing* more!" said Cicely at last, pushing back her chair. "Why, I haven't eaten so much since — since I grew up, I believe."

"That ain't so very long ago, neither!" said the woman, smiling at her as she gathered up the dishes. "Now, what'd ye say to a mite o' rest? There's a sofy in the settin'-room where ye can cuddle down snug's a mouse. Wun't ye try it?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Cicely. "I must be going! I've stayed too long now." She started up, looking about her uneasily.

"Now, jest wait a minute," said the woman, laying a detaining hand on her arm. "There ain't any cars out o' town till the even hour. Which way ye goin'?"

"To — to —" stammered Cicely, wholly at a loss,— for she had not the least idea where she was, having neither asked a question nor made a plan in her head-long flight,— "why, to — New York."

"N'York!" said the woman. "N'York by the way o' *this* neighbourhood! Why, where'd ye come from?"

"From — Cheltenham," faltered Cicely.

"Good land alive!" exclaimed the woman. "Why, yo're half as far again from N'York as you was in Cheltenham! Did ye take the wrong car, dear?"

"I — I suppose so," said Cicely. "I didn't exactly know — where I was going."

The woman looked at her keenly. "Folks expectin' ye?" she asked.

"No — that is, yes — I — I mean I haven't quite decided — who I'm going to see," said Cicely, floundering more and more.

"An' what about the fam'ly?" pursued the other, gently inexorable. "Wun't mother be lookin' for ye? Wun't they be anxious to home?"

Cicely's feeble defences broke down. These moments of comfort and kindness had melted away the numb chill from her heart, and, with a sudden great rush of misery, she realised her desolation. "Oh!" she cried, a sob swelling in her throat, "oh, nobody cares! I haven't any mother, nor — nor any home. Nobody expects me, nobody wants to see me. I'm all, all alone!"

The woman nodded. "There, there, dear!" she said, patting Cicely's hand. "I knowed ye'd run away the minute I see ye,— young an' pretty as you be, wanderin' round in the snow in them clo'es. How was it, dearie — stepmother?"

"No," said Cicely, her breath catching. "Worse than that. Much, much worse. I — I can't tell about it."

"Ye couldn't think o' goin' back?" suggested the woman gently.

"Oh, no, *no!*" cried Cicely, starting up with dilated eyes. "I must go away — I can never go back. Good-bye — and thank you — and let me go, please!" She was on her feet, trying to loosen the kind hand, and straining towards the door.

The woman, rising too, took her firmly by both shoulders, and pushed her back into the chair. "You set there," she said. "Now, take off yore hat an' coat, an' give 'em to me. Will ye lay down in the settin'-room, or would ye ruther go up to yer own room an' rest?"

"But — but —" faltered Cicely, "I'm going — I'm going away —"

"Yo're goin' to stay right here, that's what *yo're* goin' to do," said the woman, with decision. "D'ye think I'll let ye go ramblin' off over the face o' the earth

alone, a child like you? You stay with me a spell, dear, an' keep me comp'ny. I hed a daughter somethin' like you once," she added softly, "but I couldn't keep her."

The loving-kindness of the tone brought the tears crowding to Cicely's eyes. She laid her head against the high back of the chair, and cried softly and heart-broke-
nely. "Oh, what shall I do!" she sobbed. "I've no-
where to go — nobody to turn to —"

"There, there, dearie," said the woman, smoothing her hair tenderly, "ye've got me. I'll take care o' ye."

"If I could stay — just a little, little while —" sobbed Cicely, "just until I get brave — and — and don't need to be loved —"

The woman's eyes filled. "You stay with me, dear," she said, "an' I'll — I'll love ye."

Cicely caught her hand, with a great quivering sigh. "I'll stay,—" she said, "oh, if you'll love me!" And, holding the kind hand tight, she sobbed herself away into exhausted sleep.

The woman stood by her, untiring and patient, stroking the soft hair. "Poor lamb!" she said under her breath. "Poor little lost lamb!"

§

So it came about that Cicely, the unthoughtful and improvident, was thought for and provided for as always. That she should find a home so soon was in the nature of a fortunate and peculiarly apposite miracle, for she had come away with no store but the little money that chanced to be in her purse and the few garments in her hand-bag, and, being totally unfit for self-help of

any kind, must either have greatly suffered or promptly starved. However, she gave, as usual, little thought to her good fortune. These bare necessities of food, shelter and kindness had been hers too continually, too inevitably, to be matters for wonder or thankfulness; she accepted them without question, and repaid them only by the habitual careless sweetness of her manner.

For the rest, her trouble absorbed her entirely. She was too bruised by pain to be aware of anything but her own sick, suffering spirit.

Her sudden advent in this place, like a meteor dropped from the sky, was accepted with surprisingly little stir. Probably the farmer's wife, seeing her visitor's terrified shrinking from questions, had warned her little world that the visit must be taken as a matter of course; at all events, no one exclaimed over Cicely, and every one seemed ready to give her the peace and immunity she craved. The woman herself, though her glances hung with tender yearning on the bright head and pale face, had adopted a cheerful matter-of-fact demeanour that calmed Cicely immeasurably, even while she hardly perceived it; the farmer treated her with good-natured, half-quizzical respect; and the farm-hands, who slept away from the house and only appeared briefly at meals, were cowed by her presence into dumb voracity. She had given the name of her girlhood, Cicely Cameron; the farmer's wife promptly adopted a motherly "Cicely," the farmer called her "Miss," and the men called her nothing at all, except an occasional mumbled "Pass the butter, please." So Mrs. Roger Ford slipped quietly out of sight, and Cicely was born again into life in its simplest form.

XI

THE UNKNOWN LAND

If Cicely had been minded for it, there was matter of absorbing interest in her new surroundings. The refuge upon which she had stumbled was a dairy-farm on the outskirts of the village of Stowe; a smoothly rolling country, green and luxuriant in summer, and now, at the end of winter, already black with the promise of coming fertility. Her hosts, John and Martha Gibson, were the finest fruit of that vintage that grows sanely and wholesomely near the soil, under the open sky,—he, shrewd, humorous and big-hearted; she all capability and all kindness. Their neighbours were, in differing degrees, like themselves: some were harsher, some less vigorously full of character, many sharper of tongue and duller of feeling; but all were sturdy and genuine, and all full-flavoured with the rich sincerity that is born of Mother Earth.

Life at the farm was a constant bustle of activity, ending only with the ending of the day, and resumed again promptly at sunrise. As soon as clothes were on and fires glowing, John Gibson and the "hands" went to the barns to feed the clamouring stock, and Martha made ready the substantial dinner that was served three times a day under different names. Presently the men returned

from the long cow-barn with the warm and frothing pail-fuls of milk: then they all gathered in the dairy, where, on a zinc-covered table with a trench of running water down its middle, the bottles stood winking in the light; the men poured the swashing milk into a metal trough suspended above the trench, and it ran in a foaming white stream into the bottles that John pushed in quick succession under the outlet; and Martha took her stand at the end of the table, and fitted in the pasteboard stoppers with a dexterity born of long practice. Then came the dinner-breakfast, set upon the table while the men performed rapid ablutions in the little anteroom known as "the summer kitchin": and when that was finished, one of the men drove off to town with the load of full white bottles, John and the other man departed on various concerns of flock and field, and Martha busied herself with the mound of breakfast dishes. Then, while the men worked out-of-doors, there was the kitchen to scrub, the bedrooms to set in order, and baking, sweeping or washing to do; and then there was food to prepare again before the hungry men returned, and another mound of dishes to wash. Even when, late in the day, the men rested a while and communed with comfortable pipes, Martha sat by a pile of mending and stitched patiently and steadily. And presently came the evening milking and feeding and bottle-washing, and supper to get, and more dishes.

In the midst of all this industry Cicely sat inert and inactive, looking on with apathetic eyes. She had no imagination left, and the butterfly curiosity which had made her hover in eager interest over the strange new life of Cheltenham had been broken on the wheel of

immanent suffering. While she rocked in her deep chair by the window, and listlessly watched the brisk, unceasing movements of Mrs. Gibson, her mind never stirred out of its own self-bounded limits. She answered when she was directly addressed, and ate when she was sufficiently coaxed; and all the rest of the time she sat withdrawn into a wilderness of desolation and despair, beyond the reach of human comfort. The end of the world had come, her life was ended; what care had she for busy farmers and busy wives and the interminable fussy emptiness of other people's interests?

Yet, with all her self-absorption, the loving companionship of the farmer's wife entered little by little into her consciousness, and soothed her unawares. She grew accustomed to the cheerful presence, and drew healing from the unfailing tenderness, of her protector; and in the long hours of speechless companionship (for the older woman had the gift, rare in her sex, of rich and sympathetic silence), her bruised spirit stirred and stretched itself. She turned to Mrs. Gibson as a child turns to an over-unsselfish mother who never refuses its demands; and the unquestioning selfishness that marked her still for a child reawakened in her.

"Don't go upstairs, Mrs. Gibson," she said one day, as that busy woman, broom in hand, turned from the newly-scrubbed kitchen to the stairway.

"I've got to, dear," said Mrs. Gibson. "This is the day for sweepin' the bedrooms."

"But I don't want you to!" said Cicely. "I want you to stay here with me."

Mrs. Gibson hesitated, trying to be judiciously firm;

but Cicely's face was white and piteous, and the temptation to spoil her was too strong. "Well," she said, "I s'pose I *could* mend now, an' sweep while yo're layin' down this afternoon." She struggled a moment with her housewifely sense of fitness, and then laid aside her broom and got her work-basket.

Cicely watched listlessly, her white hands folded in her lap. "You work all the time, Mrs. Gibson," she remarked.

"Why, o' course!" said Mrs. Gibson, threading her needle. "How'd the work get done, if I didn't?"

"But don't you get tired?" asked Cicely, vaguely interested.

"Why, yes, I get tired," said the woman, "but land, I'd get a sight tireder if I didn't work. What'd I do with myself then?"

"Oh, make calls,—play cards,—" said Cicely, "all the things that people do who don't work."

"My soul, I sh'd die in my tracks!" said Mrs. Gibson emphatically. "Workin's half my life,—half the happiness of it, I mean."

"What is the other half?" asked Cicely, a dim curiosity awakening in her.

"Lovin'," answered the woman, her matter-of-fact voice softening. "Workin' an' lovin'. The way I look at it, that's happiness. Work with the folks ye love, if ye can; love the folks ye work for, if it falls out that way; but love somebody, an' work at somethin',—that's the best rule I know to reg'late life by. You think about it a little while, dear, an' see if it ain't sense."

"Working and loving!" repeated Cicely. "What a

queer combination!" She tried to comprehend it for a moment, turning it over dully in her aching mind. But the idea of work was so foreign to her horizon that she could find no place for it; and upon love, now that she was bereft of the only love she wanted, she could not bear to think. She shivered, and, turning away from the subject, stared drearily out of the window into the bleak winter-bound world.

The farmer's wife glanced at her with keen and loving eyes, and saw the darkness of self-centred brooding fall again over the momentarily lighted face. She sighed quietly. "She wun't try to think about it," she remarked to herself. "Well, it's no use talkin' about plantin' in a field that ain't ben ploughed. But who's goin' to do the ploughin'?"

§

"Mother," said the farmer one morning, coming into the kitchen with a basket of apples, "ther's jest these few Baldwins left, an' they look to me as if they wa'n't long for this world. What'd ye say to convertin' 'em into pies?"

"I'd say they couldn't come to a better end!" said Mrs. Gibson cheerfully. "You sh'll hev some for dinner this very day."

"Now if that ain't the kind of a wife to hev, I'd like to know what is!" said the farmer admiringly. "You pattern after her, Miss, an' you wun't make any mistake."

Cicely looked after him, as he tramped off to the barn, with a faint stirring of amusement. What an idea, that

she could ever be the same kind of wife as this hard-labouring farmer-woman, with the work-worn hands! The man had no sense of fitness. She glanced from her own dainty, useless person to the capable figure of the farmer's wife, in unconscious comparison: and suddenly, observing the bright content on the older woman's face, she felt a pang of envy. It must be pleasant to be so cheerful.

"Well," said Mrs. Gibson, straightening her back from the dishpan to bend it again over the basket of apples, "here's one more chore. Land, this is goin' to be a busy day!"

"How can you go to work and make those pies, Mrs. Gibson, when you have so much else to do?" asked Cicely, moved by a vaguely jealous discontent.

"Oh, I c'n manage somehow," said the other cheerily. "O' course I may hav to hustle a little, but it's wuth it. John does like pies so!"

Cicely turned her face away sharply. What right had these commonplace farmer-people to love, when there was no love in her own infinitely more precious life? "You'll get tired out," she said.

"Oh well, ther's some kinds o' tiredness ye'd ruther hav than lack," said Mrs. Gibson, half to herself.

Cicely was silent, brooding miserably. It seemed there was happiness in the world for everybody but herself: what colossal iniquity!

"An' it ain't only that," said the farmer's wife suddenly, thinking aloud; "when I'm doin' things for John, I get a kind of a feelin' that ye might call *mutualness*, an' it's a sight o' satisfaction. I'm a-workin' for him in the

house, an' he's a-workin' for me out-doors, an' we're both a-workin' together for the children an' the farm; an' whatever it is, we both enjoy it, becuz we're doin' it for each other. It's a kind of a partnership, ye see. Yes, that's what marriage is,— workin' together in partnership."

Cicely stared at her blankly for a minute. "You do have the strangest ideas, Mrs. Gibson!" she said.

XII

A CLUE FOR A BLINDFOLD ARIADNE

"Look-ye here, dear," said Mrs. Gibson, "see if I ain't got somethin' pretty to show ye!"

Cicely, sitting in her usual place by the window, turned listlessly. "What is it?" she asked.

"Somethin' for you," said Mrs. Gibson, her face beaming with pleasure over the big bundle in her arms. "Guess what."

"I can't guess," said Cicely apathetically. "Tell me."

"It's clo'es!" announced Mrs. Gibson. "You need some every-day ones dreadful bad,—wearin' them two beautiful dresses day in an' day out!—an' I'm a-goin' to make ye some. I've planned my work so's I c'n sew all mornin'. An' I've got the *prettiest* stuff to sew on!—jest look at this." She flung back the paper from her package, and delightedly displayed its contents of checked gingham and striped percale.

"Imagine me," thought Cicely, "dressed in that rattling stuff, like a peasant or a servant!" But her pretty manner was too instinctive to forsake her, and she thanked Mrs. Gibson graciously. That kind soul, glowing with satisfaction, busily cleared the table and laid out pattern and scissors and pins; and Cicely turned and stared out of the window again.

Cicely in these days was like a person emerging from anaesthesia. At first she had been too stunned and suffocated for conscious sensation; then through the dull horror of pervading misery there had pierced sharp stabs of pain; and then, with complete re-awakening, suddenly she was plunged in such an agony that her spirit seemed to scream aloud within her. How she loved Roger,—how she needed him,—she had never realised until now that she was cut off from him; it was as if some one had hewed the heart out of her breast, and left the bleeding cavity open. Yet with full consciousness came pride: he did not love her; then she did not love him: he had wrecked her life; should she spend herself in suffering for him? For long hours at a time she seared her soul with bitter memories; and when her need of him surged over her in a great whelming flood, she flung up hard defences of rancour and implacability. She was a tortured battle-ground, where emotions warred and struggled all day long.

"Which'll I begin on, dear, the pink or the blue?" asked Mrs. Gibson.

"I don't care," answered Cicely. "You choose." To herself she was saying, "I don't want Roger! I don't want him! I won't think of him; I hate him!"

"Well, blue's the prettiest," said Mrs. Gibson reflectively, "an' I want ye sh'd hev the prettiest there is." She spread out the stiff fabric, with its prim checkerboard of blue and white, and laid the rustling pattern on. "How d'ye like yer ginghams made, shirtwaist 'n' skirt, or all one piece 'n' buttoned down the back?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Cicely; "I never had any. (Oh,

I do hate him! I do! That's the only reason I think of him)."

"Never hed any!" ejaculated Mrs. Gibson. "Never — hed any — gingham! My land alive! But there, I said when I found ye'd never seen a Dover egg-beater that I wouldn't be surprised at *anythin'*. An' I wun't. Only — never hed any — *ginghams!*" She paused to regain control of her outraged intelligence, and then asked helplessly, "What in the world *did* ye wear, mornin's?"

"Oh, just clothes,—" said Cicely listlessly, "ordinary clothes, like this." She touched her frock of rough-woven crimson silk; and suddenly there came to her with a pang the memory of the day when, wearing it, she had frolicked herself into a crimson glow in some childish romp with Roger, and he had said that she looked like a Jacqueminot rose in a gale. "Why do I think of such things?" she asked herself angrily. "Why should I care *what* Roger said?"

"Good land!" said Mrs. Gibson. She looked at Cicely in a very despair of bewilderment. "You must 'a' lived a queer life," she said.

"I did," said Cicely; "but I've done with it."

The bitterness of her tone made the older woman straighten up and look at her more closely. Sitting there against the window, in the unconscious pathos of her youth, her beauty, and her unhappiness, Cicely was a poignantly appealing picture; and Mrs. Gibson's heart yearned over her foundling. With the practical instinct of a busy woman to manifest emotion in deeds, she looked about for some means of comfort; and, turning naturally

to her own panacea of work, took up some of the material on the table to offer it to Cicely; but just then Cicely, turning away in her chair with a little shivering sigh, folded her hands and laid her cheek upon them with one of those irresistible gestures of helplessness that joined all her world in a conspiracy to keep her helpless. "No, she's nothin' but a baby," decided Mrs. Gibson. "Let her rest." And she bent over her work again.

Presently the door opened, without warning,—after the friendly fashion of the community,—and one of the neighbour women walked in. Her name was Susan Briggs, and she lived alone in self-sufficing spinsterhood in a little white house on the road to Stowe. In person she was meagre and brisk, with decided features, and sharp black eyes that were uncomfortably penetrating, though not devoid of a certain severe kindness: in character she was decisive, intolerant, and yet beneficent in her own peremptory way, like some stringent medicine. Cicely had been more aware of her than of any of the people who dimly came and went before her indifferent eyes,—not because she cared more for Miss Briggs than for the others, but because that energetic lady's personality was too insistent to be ignored even by blindness.

"Good mornin', folks!" said Miss Briggs, shutting the door behind her with a firm impact. "I jest run in to borrow a half a cup o' vinegar, if ye can spare it. What you up to, Marthy, on upstairs-sweepin'-day? My stars! Baby blue gingham, at yore time o' life!"

"This ain't for me!" said Mrs. Gibson, laughing. "Set down, Susan. I'm a-cuttin' out some dresses for Cicely."

"Cuttin' out dresses for Cicely!" repeated Miss Briggs, seating herself by the table. "For the land's sake! Why don't Cicely cut 'em out for herself?"

Cicely came reluctantly out of her abstraction; no considerations but actual ones could exist in that positive presence. "I can't," she explained. "I don't know how."

"Goody Gorham!" exclaimed Susan Briggs. "Don't know how to cut out a dress! Why, *any* fool can foller a paper pattern. Don't tell me ye ain't got sense enough for *that*!"

"Why should she know how?" asked Mrs. Gibson, coming quickly to the defence of her darling. "She's never hed occasion."

"Time she learnt, then," said the inexorable Susan. "Here, Cicely, you turn round this way, an' take these breadths an' baste 'em together. An' Marthy, don't you cut any more. Cicely c'n cut the next dress when she gits this one done." She thrust the stiff folds into Cicely's hands, and followed them with a thimble and a needle threaded at lightning speed.

Cicely gazed at these implements helplessly. "What am I to do?" she asked. "I don't know how to sew."

"Ye *don't*!" ejaculated Susan, staring at her. "Well, if you ain't the *beatin'est*! Don't know how to sew! Good lack! Where *was* you brought up?"

"Now, now," interposed Mrs. Gibson soothingly, "don't you worry her, Susan. It don't matter a mite if she don't know how to sew; she's got time enough to learn. I didn't calc'late she sh'd do anythin' on these dresses, anyway. I've planned to hev the time." She

took the sewing materials from Cicely's lax hands, giving her a reassuring little pat on the shoulder.

Cicely thanked her with a faint, charming smile. " You see, Miss Briggs," she said, with her pretty air of making a confidence, " it's really no use for me to try this sort of thing. I've never been taught. I'm a dreadfully useless creature."

" Yes, so I see," remarked Miss Briggs grimly. " Here, you give me them breadths, Marthy. I can't stay a minute; but *I ain't* one to set an' fold my hands with other folks slavin' right before my eyes."

Cicely flushed. For one startling moment it came into her mind that perhaps there might be some other purpose in life, even for her, than that of being an ornament; and a sharp misgiving smote her. But with the next breath she remembered how Roger had said that hands like hers were flowers, not meant to be roughened by toil, and the misgiving passed in an impulse of relief. With delicate tact she withdrew her eyes from Miss Briggs' face, that that severe spinster might not be distressed by the displeasure in them; and, looking at the pretty idle hands, fell again into miserable brooding.

Miss Briggs whisked her needle, rustled her goods, and bit her thread in indignant silence, for some moments; but presently her energy could no longer be restrained from more vigorous expression, and she turned upon her hostess a rapid volley of conversation which pointedly excluded Cicely.

" Well, Marthy, I ain't seen ye for a week!" she said. " Where was ye sewin'-circle day? an' why didn't ye come to the club, the day it met to Mis' Dix's?"

"I stayed home," said Mrs. Gibson. "I was busy."

"Land knows, yo're always busy," said Susan, "but ye can usually manage to drop things an' git away now an' then, like a sensible Christian woman. What kep' ye?"

"I didn't get to go," said Mrs. Gibson mildly. "Was ther' many to Mis' Dix's?"

"Yo're keepin' somethin' back," said Susan, with sudden suspicion. "I never knowed ye to miss a club-meetin' in years. Now tell me; was ye sick?"

"No, I jest didn't get to go," repeated Mrs. Gibson. "What did they read about?"

"Marthy Gibson!" exclaimed the visitor sharply, "hev you ben stayin' home on account o' this —"

"'Sh!" said Mrs. Gibson quickly. "I stayed becuz I wanted to. What did they —"

"My land o' Goshen!" ejaculated Miss Briggs. "You, Marthy Gibson! do you mean to tell me you ain't got any more sense than to give up yore pleasure-afternoons, an' yore sweepin'-mornin's, an' all yore spare strength, to this lazy — simple — good-for-nothin' —"

"Now, Susan," said Mrs. Gibson firmly, "don't you say another word. I'm askin' you about that club-meetin', an' if yo're my friend that's what you'll talk to me about."

Susan looked rebellious, but Mrs. Gibson's tone was decisive; and she yielded with a sniff. "Well, it was a good meetin'," she said. "Everybody asked about you, an' said they hedn't scarcely seen ye these last six weeks; they wondered what under the sun kep' ye home so tight. No, I ain't a-goin' to say anythin',— ye needn't worry. Ellen Richards read a paper on 'Modern Edu-

cation'; 'twas real good,— not so wishy-washy as most o' her stuff."

"I wish't I'd 'a' heard it," said Martha Gibson wistfully. "I love to hear 'bout schools an' colleges an' sech."

"No reason why ye shouldn't 'a' heard it, but yer own foolishness!" said Susan pointedly. "How's Johnny? Hed a letter lately?"

"Yes; one last week, an' one fine long one yestiddy," said Martha, her face brightening beautifully. "Mebbe I wasn't glad to get 'em!"

"Read 'em to me," commanded Susan. "You ain't read me one in a dog's age."

Mrs. Gibson shook her head, glancing at Cicely. "Not now," she said. "Some other time."

The visitor put down her work, and confronted her hostess with a piercing glance. "Now, Marthy Gibson!" she said. "I sh'd like to know why them letters can't be read now jest as well's any other time! What ails ye?"

"Well, fact is," said Mrs. Gibson, in a lowered voice, "I don't speak much 'bout Cheltenham these days. I never say the name before *her*."

"Before who? Cicely?" demanded Susan. "Why not? She don't think she's got the exclusive rights to the name o' Cheltenham, does she?"

Cicely started at the sound of her name, and came back again to the actual world. They were talking about her! — and now an uneasy instinct warned her that they had been doing so before she became aware of it. She sat up straight, instantly on the defensive.

"No, no," murmured Mrs. Gibson hastily. "But she don't like to hear 'bout it; it makes her feel bad. I don't even mention Johnny, an' I don't let John neither."

"My goody gracious!" ejaculated Susan. "Who is this girl, anyway,—the queen o' Sheby?—that she sh'd come upsettin' yore house an' yore daily life, an' takin' all the pleasure out o' yore conversation? For the land's sake! if you an' John ain't a pair o' softies! I s'pose next thing you'll be fillin' up the house with rose-leaves, for fear she sh'd hev to step on the floor like other folks! Lemme tell ye this, it'd do that girl a world o' good to meet up with somebody with a little *sense*; looks to me as if she'd ben livin' with loonies too long a'ready!"

Cicely rose, deeply flushed. "If you will kindly wait, Miss Briggs, until I can get out of the room," she said indignantly, "you can discuss me with even more freedom."

"Now, Cicely! now, Susan!" protested Mrs. Gibson, deeply distressed. "Don't talk like that, Susan,—an' don't you mind it, Cicely, it's jest her way—"

"I don't feel called upon," said Cicely loftily, "to stand that kind of conversation in Miss Briggs' way or any one's way. Good morning."

"Oh, ye needn't bother to go!" said Susan grimly, rising too. "I only come in for a minute, an' I've heard so much foolishness sence I ben here that I've got to go home an' *scrub* somethin' to git it out o' my systim. Can I hev my vinegar, Marthy? Thank ye. Good-bye." The door closed sharply behind her.

"Don't you pay any 'tention to her, dear," said Mrs.

Gibson soothingly. "Susan always talks like that; she don't mean anythin'."

"She doesn't understand me," said Cicely, choking down an injured sob; and instinctively she added within herself, "Roger would never let me be abused so!"

§

Now the spring was beginning to come, groping delicately through the loosened earth, moving softly in the swelling buds. The fields were still black, and the trees bare, but the new life was stirring impalpably, exquisitely, and the grim earth was strangely transfigured. The farm-activities took on new vigour; John Gibson and his men were always at work, ploughing fields, mending fences, getting ready for the season of sowing and growing. Martha too was in a bustle of happy energy, running into the yard half-a-dozen times a day to feel the earth of her garden-beds, to look at the buds on the lilac-twigs, and to "smell the spring." Even the farm-hands, stirred into a kind of stolid hilarity, began to crack dim jokes and slap each other's backs explosively.

Cicely, sensitive harp that she was, had felt the invisible fingers of the spring sooner than any of them; but instead of answering their touch with sweet harmonies, she was only moved to a wild turbulence of discords. Her hunger for Roger, deepening every day, was now (in this season of universal *Sehnsucht*), almost intolerable; thwarted and repulsed, it turned back upon her in emotional storms that frightened herself by their violence: and, now that she was recovering from the fatigue and

shock of her great cataclysm, re-awakening physical strength stirred in her and drove her to a restlessness that was maddening. She vented her energy in long, solitary walks, and in secret wild weeping; and horrible thoughts of suicide and despair haunted her in the darkness.

One morning she stood in the doorway, looking restlessly from the ever-active Martha to the men and horses working in the field. "Everybody's busy but me!" she said bitterly. "How do they all find so much to do?"

Martha glanced up from the three-times-daily pile of dishes. "Would ye like to do somethin', dear?" she asked sympathetically.

"How could I?" returned Cicely with sweet impatience. "There isn't anything I know how to do. I suppose I'll have to take a walk."

Martha glanced again at the dishpan, and again at Cicely; but it needed a sterner nature than hers to suggest a conjunction between objects so dissimilar. She was not without an uneasy inkling that she was spoiling her darling, but her instinct, like that of many unselfish women, was all for spoiling; and Cicely's youth and pathos, and unquestioning expectation of being spoiled, made the process fatally easy. She hesitated to speak, and while she stood irresolute, Cicely had taken her coat from its peg and gone.

At the foot of the lane that led down from the farmhouse, the highroad ran right and left, bordered with low-growing evergreens. No one was in sight, and the road, twisting romantically, and dark with the rich brown that promises spring, would have been full of allure to

any one with a free mind and an adventurous eye. But to Cicely, hag-ridden by loneliness and despair, in either direction it was horrible,— to the left, because it led to dwellings and curious eyes, to the right because it led to solitude. After a brief hesitation she chose the lonely way as the lesser evil, and hurried along as fast as she could to get away from the possible pursuit of observation. But when she had passed the turn of the road that hid her from the farm-house, and was beyond sign of any human companionship, suddenly panic seized her. She remembered the dark pine-wood a little way ahead of her, where one day she had fallen into such a stark horror of desperation that she thought to have gone mad; remembered, too, the swift stream that raced under the bridge beyond the next turn, beside which she had more than once been hypnotised into thoughts of cold black depths, and silence, and oblivion: and the warm life surged up in her with a shuddering cry. She was afraid to live,— but oh, she did not want death, death of the body or the brain! She faced about quickly, and, running, fled from the fear of fear back towards the village and her fellow-men.

Presently she came upon a small white house, set back from the road and gleaming among sparse shrubbery. She knew it for the abode of Susan Briggs, and, checking her speed, hovered doubtfully in front of it; she had no love for the sharp spinster, but she needed human companionship, and was afraid of Martha's fond eyes. While she stood hesitating, the sound of shrill singing from within reached her ears; there was cheerfulness in-

side the house, at least, and despair outside it. So she made her decision, and, following the sound, went up the side path to the back door.

"From—*Green-land's i-cy moun-tins*," came the voice, in a strongly accented rhythm, "From *In-jy's cor-al stra-and*—Who's there? Oh, it's you, Cicely. Walk in, an' take a seat if ye can find a place to set on."

Cicely, pushing open the unlatched door, found herself in a small kitchen, spotless, warm, and full of the basic sort of comfort that grows up around an active body and a contented mind. Susan was, as usual, hard at work, scrubbing an already immaculate floor to an unimagined perfection of spotlessness, with brisk sweeps of the arm that had acted as a metronome to her singing. Cicely, perceiving no unclaimed island in the ocean of cleanliness, sat on the doorstep and looked wistfully in.

"Mornin'!" said Susan cheerfully, quite unembarrassed by the memory of their parting,—indeed her plainness of speech was so much of a habit that such partings were frequent in her experience. "This ain't much of a place to hev comp'ny in; but then it's no time o' day for comp'ny anyhow. What *you* doin' round so early,—Marthy send ye on an errand?"

"No, I'm just taking a walk," said Cicely. "I hadn't anything to do at the house."

Susan stopped the steady march of her scrubbing-brush, and looked up with blank astonishment. "Nothin' to do!" she said. "Nothin' to do at *this* time o' day! Goody Gorham, Cicely, are ye crazy?"

Cicely looked astonished in her turn. "But what

should I do?" she asked. "What is there for me to do here, at this or any other time of the day?"

"Well, I never!" said Susan. "Don't ye eat, to yore house? Don't ye sleep? Don't ye make a clutter, same's other humans? My land! Ye needn't tell me ther's a Christian house in this neighbourhood without dish-washin' an' bed-makin' an' sweepin' to do in the mornin', becuz I wun't believe it."

"But Mrs. Gibson does all those things," explained Cicely. "I should only be in the way if I hung around her. In fact, sometimes I've thought I'm a little in the way anyhow."

Susan Briggs abandoned her scrubbing entirely, wiping her hands and sitting back on her heels to give her whole attention to a situation so amazing. "Cicely Cameron!" she exclaimed. "Are you settin' there in broad daylight an' tellin' me that Marthy does every stroke o' work in that house,—yore work an' all,—an' you never lift a finger to help her?"

"But how can I?" asked Cicely, as blank as she. "I don't know how to do anything!"

"For the—Lord's—sake!" ejaculated Susan. "There! I don't often swear, but you'd drive John the Baptist to it." She was silent a moment, overwhelmed; then, with a vehemence that made her visitor start, she burst forth, "Good land o' *Goshen*, Cicely! Git up an' *learn*!"

Cicely opened her lovely eyes wide. "I, learn!" she repeated faintly.

"Yes, you, learn!" said Susan emphatically. "Roll up yore sleeves an' git up an' *do* somethin'! Show that the Lord hed *some* reason for makin' ye! O' course it's

ridic'lous to start in, like a child o' five, at yore time o' life," she added mercilessly, "but sence ye can't begin sooner, for gracious sakes begin now!"

"But people like me don't do those things!" protested Cicely. "They weren't meant to."

"Wa'n't they?" demanded Susan, in a repressed and very penetrating voice. "Why wa'n't they?"

"Why, because — because — I don't know why," faltered Cicely.

"I guess ye don't," returned Susan grimly. "Ye don't think yo're better'n Marthy Gibson, I hope?"

"Oh, no," said Cicely politely.

"Ye *do!*!" exclaimed Susan, staring at her. "Well,— I — swan! A little, simple, turnip-headed snip like you, that don't know s' much as how to string a *bean* — you think yo're better'n a woman that's brought up a husband an' four children, an' buried one, an' done all the female work of a farm, an' took care of a nuisance like you besides! My land, if I was the Lord I sh'd take a shingle to ye." She sat searing Cicely with her scornful eyes for a moment of silence. "What in the world *hev* ye done all yer life?" she inquired presently. "What excuse *hev* ye hed for livin'?"

"Why — why —" stammered Cicely, completely taken aback, "I've — had lessons,— and — gone to parties,— and — and entertained,— and —"

"My goody!" interrupted Susan with contemptuous pity. "It must be awful to lounge round an' clutter up the earth like that. I'd ruther be a dishcloth. Twenty-two years old if yo're a day, an' don't even know enough to know ther's sech a thing as work! Livin' in the same

house as Marthy,— watchin' her cook for five, an' wash up for five, an' clean, an' scrub, an' sew, an' do dairy work, an' make beds, an' wash an' iron,— an' then comin' round here at eight o'clock in the mornin' an' talkin' about nothin' to do! Good lack, Cicely! why, a *wart's* more use'n what you be!"

Cicely flushed hotly. "If she'd asked me to help her—" she began.

"If you'd hed a grain o' sense you'd 'a' seen how much she needed help," said Susan sharply. "But I s'pose 'people like you' don't notice sech low things. I don't s'pose ye noticed how she made that dress ye've got on, doin' her sweepin' at five in the mornin' to git the time,— an' you settin' by like a flat-iron an' never s' much as overcastin' a seam. An' I don't s'pose ye notice how often them little lemon tarts ye like so much come on the table,— nor how long they take to make, an' how short to eat. An' who d'ye s'pose pays for all this? Them ginghams, that ain't scarcely good enough for ye,— did ye know Marthy bought 'em with her egg-money, that she was savin' to git herself a spring dress with? an' did ye know's she's ben killin' her chickens, 'stid o' sellin' 'em, becuz that's the only kind o' meat you c'n eat? — her dress is on yore outside, an' her hat on yore inside, now. She'll wear her old clo'es again this spring, I s'pose. But then that wun't matter; she never goes anywhere now, becuz you say yo're afraid o' bein' lonesome if she goes out. Huh!"

"Oh, Miss Briggs — Miss Briggs —" gasped Cicely, wide-eyed and hot-cheeked, "why, I never thought — I never dreamt —"

"No, I know ye didn't," said Susan caustically. "Dreamin' ain't much in the line o' 'people like you,'—excep' day-dreamin' an' gawpin' out o' the winder while other folks are slavin' for ye. My goody gracious, Cicely! If I was in yore place I'd go an' swap off that shiny head for one that's got a *little* o' the illumination *inside!*"

"Thank you, Miss Briggs!" said Cicely, rather breathlessly. "That's not a bad suggestion. Thank you very much." She rose to her feet, blinking with the shock of her surprise.

"Entirely welcome," said Susan drily. She took a long breath after her flight of eloquence, and looked at her visitor with half-defiant misgiving. "Ain't mad, are ye?" she inquired.

"No," answered Cicely. "I'm much obliged. I've — I've learned a good deal this morning." Her eyes, though half dazed by the rush of new ideas, grew suddenly bright as she looked at her adviser. "Good-bye!" she said. "I can't stop any longer; I must hurry; there's so much to do!"

"Well, good-bye," said Susan. She watched with dawning approval as Cicely shook out her skirt and sped down the steps; and when the slender figure reached the road and broke into a run, her face softened in a grim little smile. "After all, you ain't sech a fool as ye look!" she called.

Cicely nodded smilingly over her shoulder; she was running too fast to speak. "I must get home before those dishes are done!" she said to herself.

XIII

LIGHT IN THE LABYRINTH

WITH the digesting of Susan Brigg's sharp medicine, a new life began for Cicely. No inkling had ever entered her mind that she could have a place in the busy world of doers; the idea came like a thunderbolt, and, weighted with shame at the realisation of the sorry part she had been playing, it sank deep into a mind which was now empty of all distractions. She plunged into the task of making amends to the farmer's wife with passionate zest, following her from room to room, and sharing all her labours with an eagerness which puzzled and delighted that kind soul. And, while she struggled and learned, the blessed anodyne of work took hold upon her mind, and drugged it to peace; her hands were busy all day long, and at night, tired out, she slept dreamlessly.

"My, she's a different girl from what she was a month ago!" exclaimed the outspoken Susan, coming in one morning as Cicely, with *deft* fingers, was preparing vegetables for dinner. "When she first come here she was the helplessest jelly-fish I ever see; an' look at her now! She handles them potatoes jest as if she reco'nized a potato when she see one."

"Yes, she certainly *hes* changed," said Mrs. Gibson, gazing on her fondly. "Look at her cheeks! They used

to be white's a sheet, an' now they're colour o' peach-blossoms. An' she's gettin' so she can make bread as good's you or me. We hed some this week that I never laid a finger to,—bakin' nor anythin',—an' I wish't you'd 'a' seed John; he was that proud, a little more an' he'd 'a' sent it to the County Fair."

Cicely looked up from her work with a gleam of reviving sauciness. "The Girl Wonder of Stowe!" she said. "Intelligence almost human!"

"Makes jokes, too!" remarked Susan, in her impersonal fashion. "Well, Marthy, I guess she's a sight more agreeable comp'ny 'n she used to be, floppin' round like a weepin' willer. What d'ye hear from Johnny?"

Martha looked at her with a glance of warning. "He's well, thank ye," she said. "When are ye goin' to the city?"

"Same time's ever,—fifth of April," said Susan. "What's Johnny got to say 'bout Cheltenham?"

"Nothin' much," said Martha, frowning significantly. "I 'spose ye'll hev a fine time to Cousin Jane's."

"Now, Marthy Gibson!" exclaimed Susan severely. "You don't mean to tell me yo're still afraid to say a word 'bout Cheltenham before that girl! Well, a little more, an' you'll make me believe yo're soft-headeder'n she is. Why, Cicely ain't made o' burnt paper, that sayin' the name o' Cheltenham'll knock her over! Are ye, Cicely?"

Cicely, putting a strong compulsion on herself, forced her eyes to look up and meet Susan's steadily. It was true, as the loving instinct of Mrs. Gibson had long since discovered, that the name of the place where she

had been so happy and so wretched was torture to her; and of late, since she had found this new palliative of work, she had almost succeeded in pushing it out of her mind. But she had a wholesome fear of the visitor's sharp eyes and tongue, and shrank from betraying her real feeling. "Certainly not," she said bravely. "What about Cheltenham?"

"Why, Mis' Gibson's got a son there that she thinks the world an' all of," said Susan, "an' she's got some punkin-headed notion that she ought not to talk to you 'bout him. I guess you c'n stand hearin' him mentioned without hollerin' for the doctor, can't ye?"

"Of course," said Cicely. "Tell me about him, Mrs. Gibson. I never knew you had any son but the two in the city."

"Yes, I got Johnny," said Mrs. Gibson. Her voice altered and softened exquisitely, filling with love and pride.

"An' what kind of a boy is he?" demanded Susan. "Is he a nice boy, or ain't he? Is he a smart boy, or a noodle?"

The farmer's wife glanced doubtfully at Cicely, but, finding her calm and apparently interested, could not resist the beloved subject. "Oh, Johnny's the smartest boy," she said, "an' the *best* boy —! Jest think, workin' as hard as he does for his schoolin', for two years he's ben head of his class in one study, an' second in another. An' he's earned every cent o' what it cost, an' give presents to his father an' me, Christmases, besides. I don't s'pose ther' ever was a better boy 'n my Johnny,— bless his heart!"

"Now, you look at her!" exclaimed Susan, pointing to her friend's transfigured face with the manner of a proud showman. "Ain't it a shame for her to keep all that bottled up in her insides? Yo're enjoyin' this, ain't ye, Cicely?"

"Oh, yes," said Cicely. "Tell me some more. Has he lots of friends?"

"Land, I sh'd say so!" said Mrs. Gibson happily. "Why, I s'pose ther' ain't one o' the waiters in Jefferson Hall, where he works, that ain't like a brother to him; an' Mr. Randolph, he that runs the Bureau o' Student Self-help, he said ther' wa'n't a student in Cheltenham hed more chances at good jobs than Johnny. An' my, the good times he hes! Nights, when they've got the'r dinin'-room work done, they set in each other's rooms an' study; an' Sunday afternoons ther's free concerts, an' afterwards they take walks together; an' he belongs to a debatin' s'ciety; an' once every year he gets invited to the President's house."

"Why, he's one of the janitors!" thought Cicely. "Perhaps Roger knows him.— I mustn't think about Roger; I mustn't."

"Tell about the professors," prompted Susan. "You seem to think they're cherubims an' seraphims, the whole lot of 'em. Tell about them angelic critters."

"Well, I must say,—" said Martha, with a glowing face and unusual volubility, "you c'n laugh, Susan, but I must say I don't s'pose ther's sech another lot o' men anywhere in this state. Jest think o' what they do! With all the education an' all the brains they got, givin' up their lives, an' their chance o' makin' money, an' all

that, jest to train up those boys into men,— do you s'pose ther's anythin' finer than that? An' unselfish — my land! Why, ther's one man there that's sot up nights a hundred times with Johnny, helpin' him with work that come hard to him; Johnny says he never could 'a' got through his soph'more year without him. My, if I get started on that man—! Johnny says the encouragement, an' the friendship, he's hed from him —”

“ Now we're gittin' there! ” chuckled Susan, with acrid affection. “ I knowed 'twouldn't be long before we reached the mornin' star an' fount of every blessin'! You want to listen, Cicely: this is the feller that makes Jonathan Edwards look like a pickpocket.”

A hand seemed to clutch Cicely's heart, throttling its beating. Some instinct made her certain that they were talking of Roger; and she knew that if she listened all the passion of longing and despair that she had been keeping at bay would rush back to overwhelm her. She rose quickly, averting her face. “ I haven't time now — I must put my potatoes on,” she said unsteadily.

Mrs. Gibson cast a quick glance at her, and checked her flow of speech. “ Well, jest hear me! ” she said. “ Gabblin' on as if I hedn't a thing in the world to do but gabble,— an' here it's butter-packin' day, an' boiled dinner to get int' the bargain! Land sakes, Cicely, I guess if you ain't got time, I ain't neither. You excuse me, Susan; I got to be steppin'.”

“ So've I,” said Susan, rising. “ I jest run in to pass the time o' day. I'm glad I got that much out o' yore systim, Marthy, anyway! You give her a shakin' up

'bout once in so often, Cicely, so's all that Cheltenham talk wun't *settle* in her."

"Oh, Cicely needn't bother!" said Mrs. Gibson, laughing. "I've talked s' much now I c'n afford to hold my tongue awhile."

"Well, if Cicely lets it get stuck like 'twas before, I'll come over an' take the monkey-wrench to it," remarked Miss Briggs, departing.

"There, I've escaped this time!" thought Cicely, "and I'll know better than to run such a risk again. I mustn't think about — him; and I won't, I won't!"

§

Yet all day the tantalizing nearness of the subject she was trying to avoid gave her no peace, and finally, at supper-time, she could not keep her tongue from it. "I'll just find out if it *is* Roger," she thought, "and then, when I know for certain, I can forget all about it." So she turned to the farmer, beside whom she sat, and said,— not without a frightened shortening of the breath,— "I've just heard that you have a son at college, Mr. Gibson. Why didn't you ever tell me about him?"

The farmer confronted her with an astonished face, ruddy with exercise and cold ablutions. "Why, Marthy said ye didn't want —" he began; then, checking himself hastily in response to a sub-mensal conjugal prod, "Why, I — well, ye see,— well, I jest didn't seem to happen to!"

"I wish you would," said Cicely simply. "I used to live in Cheltenham, and I — I was very fond of it." She heard herself making this statement without surprise; it

seemed now, looking back, that it had always been true. "Your son likes it, doesn't he?"

"He does so!" said the farmer; and under his dry matter-of-fact surface came the same quickening of pride and love that his wife had shown. "He jest swallers it whole,— same's I would've if I'd hed a chance. O' course, I do' know's Johnny's getting the real *advantages* o' college,—" he added, with a twinkle in his shrewd eyes, "runnin' high jumps, an' broken ribs, an' You-Be-The-Goat s'cieties,— but as fur's plain *knowledge* is concerned, he's certainly doin' well."

"And he likes the — the faculty?" pursued Cicely, beginning to tremble a little.

"His teachers? I sh'd say he did!" said John Gibson. "I'd thrash him if he didn't. You know 'em, Miss Cicely; now ain't they an A No. 1 lot?"

"Oh, yes," said Cicely. She hesitated for a moment, trembling more and more; but now, though she was afraid to go on, she was unable to turn back. "I think there's one — one he — likes — more than all," she stammered. "Do you — do you know who that is?"

The farmer turned in his elbow-chair, melted into complete unreserve. "Yes, ma'am, I do," he said emphatically; "I certainly do; I've hed the privilege o' shakin' hands with that man; an' what's more,— well, I ain't sentimental, you know that, but I b'lieve I'd walk ten miles barefoot to do somethin' to oblige him. Professor Roger Ford, that's his name: an' I guess the Recordin' Angel'll write it down in pretty big letters. What that man's done for our Johnny — well, I'd need to know the dictionary by heart to tell it all out.— Lord,

Miss Cicely!" exclaimed John Gibson, with a burst of rare emotion, "what happiness you've hed, livin' right side by side with men like that!"

At the sound of Roger's name, Cicely's heart, that had been so chilled and steeped in resentment, gave a great joyous leap of pride. "My Roger!" she thought. "It's my own Roger that they love so!" and for a moment she was ready to shout her glorious secret aloud, that these people who knew how to value him might rejoice with her. But on the heels of her gladness came the thought, "No, not my Roger any longer. Never, never again." And when the farmer's last words reached her, her heart plunged downwards into a bottomless abyss of despair, sickening and suffocating her.

"Yes, I've — had — happiness," she said faintly. "Will you — excuse me, please? I'm — not hungry." She pushed her chair away from the table, and struggled to her feet.

"Why, Cicely!" said the farmer, his kind face clouding with affectionate anxiety. "What's the matter? Ain't ye well?"

Mrs. Gibson, jumping up, hurried to her side. "You come upstairs with me, dear," she said. "Yo're all tired out. An' you, John, you ain't got any more sense than a — than a man; that's what's the matter with *you*." She put a warmly protecting arm around Cicely, and led her from the room.

In her little chamber under the eaves, Cicely flung herself on the bed and burst into passionate sobbing. Her barriers of self-protection were gone, and despair surged over her in a flood. "Oh, I can't bear it!" she

cried within herself. "They mustn't speak of him—they have no right! Roger, Roger, Roger! Oh, I hate you, Roger—I won't think of you—I won't—oh, Badger, they talk of you—they love you—and I've lost you—Badger—"

"Dearie!" said Martha Gibson, sitting by the bed and folding the slender body in her arms. "What's the trouble? Tell me; tell mother, dear!"

Cicely caught at her sobbing breath, trying to still it. "I can't—I can't," she said. "Don't ask me—I can never tell it."

"Yes, ye can, dear," said the older woman gently. "The longer ye keep it shet up, the worse it hurts. Let it out, dear; tell me all about it. Mebbe I can help."

"No, no," sobbed Cicely, struggling for self-possession, "nobody can help. Something went cruelly wrong in my life,—but it's too late now—to make it right again. It's all—all over."

"Nothin's ever all over," said Mrs. Gibson, holding her close. "The longer ye live, the more ye know that. It's always there, waitin' to be took up again whenever we're willin',—love, or hate, or whatever we cry about,—nothin' can stop it but death, an' even that can't stop it forever. An' death ain't hed any hand in *yore* trouble, dear."

Cicely shivered. "My trouble is worse than death," she said. "Nothing can help it—nothing. Everything is ended—hope—life—"

Mrs. Gibson smiled, a wise, tear-misted smile. "It's queer what a sight o' things that's ended forever manages somehow to begin again," she said. "I've seen a many

people cry 'emselves blind, little daughter, but never a one that couldn't see again after the tears was wiped away."

"She can't understand; she could never understand," said Cicely to herself, with dreary finality. Conquering her weeping with a great effort, she slipped out of the loving arms, and stood up. She felt all alone in a vast, hostile world, naked and very cold. "Then you haven't seen trouble like mine," she said aloud, steadying her voice with a note of hardness. "There is no cure for that."

The farmer's wife rose too. "Cicely," she said gravely, "for every person in the world that thinks he's ben wronged, ther's another that thinks *he's* ben wronged too; an' the chances are that the other's jest as right as the first one. Trouble's most always got more'n one side."

Cicely shook her head. "Not my trouble," she answered stubbornly.

Mrs. Gibson, feeling herself repulsed, gave a little sigh. "Well, that's as it may be," she said quietly. "Now I'm goin' to put ye to bed, dear. Yo're all wore out." Without more words she began to take off the pretty garments and unbind the shining hair, looking meanwhile with mute yearning at the white, set face.

Cicely, centred in misery, suffered all these ministrations in unheeding silence. But when everything was done, and the older woman was tucking her into her narrow bed, a new instinct,—born of these last weeks of helpfulness,—made her look up with suddenly observant eyes. "Why, you're tired, Mrs. Gibson!" she

said. "And — why, you've been crying! What is it makes you so good to me?"

"I love ye, dear," answered the farmer's wife, simply.

"Oh, and I love you!" cried Cicely, with a warm rush of gratitude. "You're the best woman I've ever known. Kiss me."

"Good night, little daughter," said the woman, kissing her fondly.

"Good night — mother," said Cicely. She had never said the word within her own memory; it sounded strangely in her ears.

After the door had closed behind the farmer's wife, Cicely lay thinking, a little tranquillized by the last incident. "I called her Mother," she said to herself, dreamily. "I wish she *were* my mother. I love her. And the farmer, too,— I love him, I think; he looked at me so kindly when I came away. They're the kindest people in the whole world." Then, suddenly, with a shock of surprise, the thought jumped into her mind, "Why, these are the people that Roger's 'janitors' come from! — and they're better people, a hundred times better, than I! What if — what if I made a mistake about that?" For a long time she lay bewildered by wonder, while, through this first rift, light came pouring into her carefully darkened mind.

At last she sat up in bed, in the newly illumined dark, and made her confession bravely. "Roger was right, and I was wrong. Roger knew best; I wish I could beg his pardon. . . . And now it's too late, too late! I'm just learning what he is,— and I've lost him — forever! O Roger, Roger — forever! Oh, why was I so blind?"

XIV

THE SEASON OF GROWING

THE spring marched on, radiant, triumphant; and with it marched the mind of Cicely, rediscovering life. The little leaves peeped out to greet the shining sun; the birches were a shimmer of misty green over a gleam of virgin white, and the oak-leaves, in little rosy clusters, made those five-toed "squirrel-paws" which used to mark for the Indians the time for sowing corn. The farmer was hard at work in the fields, ploughing, planting, nurturing; and Cicely, whenever she was at a pause in her work about the house, followed him, learning for the first time the wonderful lore of creation.

"Why do you tear up the earth, that looks so smooth and peaceful, and leave it all jagged and raw?" she asked him.

"So's it can blossom in its time," said the farmer. "'Twun't fret much 'bout the troubles o' ploughin'-time when it's dressed for spring."

"That's a hard way to grow beautiful," said Cicely, with a sigh.

"I expect it's 'bout the surest way, though," observed John Gibson.

"And the poor little seeds," added Cicely, shivering, "it's hard on them, too, to be buried in the black, cold ground!"

"That's the way they get the'r chance to live again," said the farmer.

§

In the house as well, as she moved from task to task, Cicely kept steadily learning. She had mastered all the simpler domestic arts, and, now that the work was growing too accustomed to be a distraction, her mind was constantly alert. She could no longer drug herself with fatigue until she ceased to think; she was tormented day and night by loneliness, and often by bitter rebellion; and yet she felt with a kind of pleasure the steadily increasing prick of the mental growing-pains.

"Mrs. Gibson," she said suddenly, one day as they stood cutting out cookies at the mixing-board, "you like to work, don't you?"

"Why, yes, dear," said Mrs. Gibson, "I s'pose I do. I always hev worked; I never thought much about it. Yes, I do like to work, first-rate."

"Do you like to work for the sake of working," asked Cicely, "or because you are working for a particular person?" For life, which used to touch her so lightly, had begun to make her analytical of late.

"Lemme see," said Mrs. Gibson thoughtfully. "I like to work, yes; an' come to think of it, I s'pose it's becuz I'm workin' for John."

"That's it," said Cicely, half to herself, "that's the whole thing,—working for John." She glanced with a sigh at her floury, useful hands, which began to look useless to her once more.

"It ain't jest makin' things for him to eat," reflected

Mrs. Gibson, thinking aloud. "It's more becuz I know he's workin', an' I like to be doin' my share. O' course ye couldn't hev a real marriage, with one workin' an' one settin' idle; that's *bound* to be a failure, becuz tain't a partnership."

Cicely looked up quickly, fastening her eyes on the older woman's face with a look of startled inquiry. "You think that?" she said.

"Why, I *know* it!" said Mrs. Gibson. "I ain't much on book-learnin', but that stands to reason. Could ye hev a business comp'ny,— or a pair o' brothers 'n' sisters,— or even a friendship,— where one o' the parties took everythin' an' give nothin'? 'Tain't possible. An' how could anybody expect to get along that way in marriage, that's the mutualest thing of all?"

Cicely's hands stopped moving, and she stared at them intently without seeing them. "But supposing," she protested, "one of the partners didn't know how to work,— or there was nothing for her to do?"

"Nothin' to do!" said Mrs. Gibson. "Cicely, child, how you talk! Why, ther' ain't anybody in this world that's got nothin' to do. They don't all work with the'r hands,— some ain't got the strength to, an' some hev money an' can hire it done, an' some hev so much education they're only fit for thinkin' jobs,— but you show me the human bein' that don't owe some kind of a duty to somebody, an' I'll show you a corpse. Land, Cicely, the world's jest *crowdin'* with things to do!"

Cicely's mind ran back over the days of her married life, and a score of half-forgotten passages started up in her memory,— Mrs. Davidson's counsels about her share

of Roger's work, times when Roger had turned to her for help which she refused to give, and the eloquent testimony of so many of the homes about them, where husband and wife worked and sacrificed happily side by side. She gave a great sigh that was half a sob. How could she have been so blind? All that time she had sat in idleness, greedy hands lying open in her lap, taking, taking, taking; she had watched Roger toil and worry, while she played the part of the horse-leech's daughter; and she had called that love — married love!

"Oh, you're right,—you're right!" she exclaimed. "Oh, why, why, *why* didn't I know, before it was too late?"

The farmer's wife looked at her with a wise, loving smile. "You ain't *too* old to learn, dear, even yet," she observed.

§

So, in the passing of winter and the blooming of the sun-warmed earth, all the frosts of resentment and bitterness melted gradually out of Cicely's soul. She knew well enough now that all the blame came back to her, to her selfishness, her ignorance, her folly; knew, too, with that cruel wisdom of the retrospect, that disaster might have been averted easily,—so easily!—if only she had had eyes to see. Many a night, not tired enough to sleep, she lay and pictured the foolish, trivial steps that had led from one catastrophe to another, until she could have beaten her brains out for the sickening needlessness of it all. Roger had been hers, they had loved, they had held heaven within their hands; and she had flung it all

away for an idle caprice, a silly fancied grievance! In those times only the coming of morning and work kept her whole and sane.

And through it all her need of Roger grew. Never, not even in those first wonder-days of their life together, had she loved him so. She thought a thousand times a day of acts of quiet nobility which she had hardly noted at the time of their performance,— of his consideration for old people, poor people, infirm people; of his beautiful brotherly kindness to his protégés; of the courteous thoughtfulness in little things that never failed him even under his greatest pressure of fatigue and worry. She thought, too, with anguish, of the passion of devotion, the infinite selfless love that had been hers. And sometimes, at the sudden memory of his shabby old working-coat, or the slow Cicely-smile that had belonged to her alone, her heart seemed to break within her.

She never questioned the irrevocableness of her loss. Now that the shimmering froth of the surface Cicely had effervesced away, underneath there showed a still pool (growing wider and deeper day by day), of reason and justice: she had spoiled her life by her own act; she must pay the penalty. When week followed week, and it became increasingly clear that Roger was making no effort to find her, she did not wonder nor rebel. She had made her lonely bed with her own hands, and would lie in it without wailing.

§

Nowadays the chief pleasure of Cicely's life was in hearing Roger spoken of by these people who loved him;

and the farmer, who had seen him face to face, became her special comforter. He had long since developed a fatherly affection for her, and she, since her discovery of the bond that united them, had begun to cherish him peculiarly; looking on him with her newly-developed sympathy, she discovered under his dry exterior a wistful idealism and a capacity for devotion which astonished her. Like so many men of his calling in New England, he had a devout reverence for education; towards it he had thirsted and aspired in his youth, and had been balked by poverty; and now that his aspirations had found a vent in his youngest son, he had conceived for his son's benefactor an admiration which amounted to a quiet middle-aged hero-worship. Roger the man of knowledge, the "professor," and Roger the warm-hearted friend, mingled in his mind into something far above the common run of men. Cicely found him as ready for the subject as herself; she had but to mention something remotely allied to college interests to lead inevitably to Cheltenham, Johnny and Roger; and their daily conversations nearly always managed to arrive at the beloved goal.

"Once, when I was a little girl," she said to him one day at the table, "my uncle took me to Ghent, just after a Belgian crew had defeated Oxford and Cambridge on the Thames; and we got there the day they returned, in the midst of the rejoicing. It was so funny! Do you know, those athletic oarsmen had long, nicely combed beards; and their admirers met them at the station with big set-pieces of roses and violets, and they bowed and smiled and clutched their flowers just like débutantes.

And then somebody shouted ' 'Eep! 'eep! ' and the others answered ' 'Urray! ' and then they all began eep-eeping together, each at his own time."

" What did they do that for? " inquired the farmer, looking puzzled. " Tryin' to sing like birds? "

" Oh, no, " said Cicely, " trying to cheer like Englishmen."

One of the farm-hands, a solemn Swede, exploded in an unexpected guffaw that made Cicely jump. So far from being annoyed, however, as she would once have been, she felt distinctly pleased at having elicited so definite a response; she gave him a comradely smile, and he grinned sheepishly back at her.

" Furrin ways must be queer, " remarked the farmer.

" Well, they're different from ours, " said Cicely.

" Yes, that's what I say, " returned John Gibson. " Our ways are good enough for me. Now that time I was to Cheltenham, an' Johnny took me to the football game, I seen a lot o' foolishness,— fellers wavin' their arms an' cock-a-doodle-dooin' all together,— but ther' wa'n't no birdy talk nor girly doin's, like you tell about. Those fellers that played was *men*, I tell ye, all the way through. An' the fellers that cheered for 'em was men too, on our side an' t'other,— got up an cheered for each other after it was over, they did, licked ones an' lickers alike."

" I wish I had seen that game, " said Cicely. " Our team won, didn't it? "

" Yes, *ma'am*,— six to nothin', " said the farmer. " I wish't ye *hed* seen it,— it was wuth seein'. Everythin' in Cheltenham is, I guess."

"Let me see,—you took a walk around the town afterwards, didn't you?" prompted Cicely.

"Well, I sh'd say so!" exclaimed John Gibson. "Why, that was when I met Professor Ford! Johnny introduced us after the game, an' he walked all over the place with us, an' took us into all the buildin's."

Cicely's heart began to quicken its beating, as it always did at this stage of the oft-told tale. "That must have been very interesting," she said eagerly.

"Inter-estin' ain't the word for it," said the farmer, with conviction. "It was a reg'lar spree for me,—that's what it was. Walkin' through them buildin's chock-full o' learnin',—with one o' the learnedest professors beside me, an' him my son's friend,—I tell ye I hed to pinch myself to make sure I was awake. That was jest about the biggest treat o' my life."

"And Pro—Professor Ford,—" said Cicely, "he loves Cheltenham; I know he enjoyed showing it."

"He did so," said the farmer. "I couldn't help but notice how it brightened him up. He was lookin' pretty sober when I fust see him, an' I says to myself, 'That's a man with somethin' on his mind'; but soon as he begun to go round with us, why, he hed a different face altogether.—An' yet 'twan't so much his pleasure in showin' off his college that heartened him up," he added thoughtfully; "'twas his pleasure in seein' how much pleasure he was givin' me."

"Oh yes, of course," said Cicely politely. Then, feeling, with the new truthfulness of perception that was a part of her re-birth, the insincerity of her reply, she cast it aside with sudden impatience. "What makes you

think that?" she demanded. "Why should he take more pleasure in pleasing you than in pleasing himself? That's not natural."

The farmer smiled, quizzically, but very kindly. "Young lady," he said, "nat'r'l or not,—when you've lived in the world as long's I hev, you'll still be surprised to see the proportion o' folks's happiness that's made out of other folks's happiness. 'Bout nine-tenths, I sh'd say, at a rough guess."

Cicely gazed at him with startled eyes of surprise. "You really believe that?" she exclaimed. "I—wonder!" And she fell silent, thinking.

§

"Mrs. Gibson," she said a little later, as the two women were washing the dishes together, "you heard what your husband said, didn't you, about getting happiness out of other people's happiness?"

"Why, yes, I heard it," said Mrs. Gibson. "I like to listen when John's talkin'," she added, reflectively; "it's so—so kind o' sensible."

"And do you believe it?" asked Cicely. "That about happiness, I mean?"

"B'lieve it? Why, o' course I do!" said Mrs. Gibson. "Why, ther's no question about it. Ther' ain't a woman in this world, I s'pose, that don't get the biggest part o' her happiness that way."

"I don't," said Cicely obstinately. "I've been thinking about it; and I know I want my own happiness, and not anybody else's."

Mrs. Gibson smiled fondly at her. "You ain't a woman, dear," she said. "Yo're a child."

"O Mrs. Gibson," said Cicely, with a sigh, "I feel as old as the world!"

"That may be, dear," said Mrs. Gibson wisely, "an' you still not *be* much older'n a robin. Though I will say," she added, "yo're growin' up fast."

"I'm learning," said Cicely humbly. "I've learned a great deal since I've been with you. But I won't believe that about other people's happiness; I want my own!"

"Well, ther's no hurry," said Mrs. Gibson tolerantly; "growin' takes time, same's any other thing that's wuth doin'."

"Afternoon, folks!" interrupted Susan Briggs, popping in at the door in her brisk Jack-in-the-box fashion. "Still sloppin' with dishes? What a pair o' slow-coaches!"

"We hed dinner late," said Mrs. Gibson, "an' we're jest done anyhow. Why, Susan, yo're all dressed up! Sure enough, this is the fifth of April. What train ye goin' to take from the village?"

"I ain't goin' from the village, thank ye!" said Susan. "That's what I come about. I'm goin' to start out in style; Richardson's folks are goin' over to Easton in their automobile, an' they're goin' to take me along that far; an' ther's room for one more, an' I want you sh'd come, Marthy. So go git ready."

"Oh, I couldn't think o' sech a thing!" answered Mrs. Gibson. "You take Cicely; she was brought up in an automobile, an' she ain't so much as sot her foot in one sence she come here."

"No more've you," said the uncompromising Susan.

"She's hed her share o' gallivantin', an' you ain't. Come, stir round. I'm a-waitin'."

"Oh, do go, Mrs. Gibson!" said Cicely eagerly. "Isn't it in Easton that they have that new library,—the one you want so much to see?"

"Yes, I do want to see that libr'y," admitted Mrs. Gibson, "but I've got all this week's mendin' to do, an' it's two days behind already,—an' to-morrow's bakin'-day, an' 'twun't get done at all."

"I'll do the mending," said Cicely. "I like to mend. Do please go, Mrs. Gibson! and do hurry!"

"Yes, for the land's sake, hurry!" commanded Miss Briggs. "Yo're slower'n Lot's wife. Let Cicely do the mendin',—she's got brains enough now; she's gittin' to be jest like folks,—an' put yore duds on."

"Well," began Mrs. Gibson, in a half-yielding tone, "maybe—'twun't take so *very* long—" and at that Cicely blew her briskly out of the kitchen, and began to load her with out-door attire in the bedroom beyond.

When the hasty good-byes had been said, and the triumphant Susan had borne her captive away, Cicely sat down by the work-table in the "settin'-room" with the mending-basket. "I told her a fib," she thought. "I hate to mend; but then I did want dreadfully to have her go. Bless her heart, she works so hard, and gets so little change! It will do her a world of good.—Now for these hateful old stockings." She fitted on her thimble and threaded her needle with a capable twist of the fingers. "If only one were 'working for John'!" she thought wistfully. "I think even darning would be happiness then. Well, I've thrown happiness

away; I mustn't expect it again." She set bravely to work, knitting her brows over the painstaking stitches.

"Well, well!" said the farmer, coming in presently with the mail. "What's all this? Where's Marthy?"

"She's gone motoring with the Richardsons," said Cicely. "Miss Briggs came for her, and between us we managed to persuade her. So I'm doing the mending; I can mend splendidly now."

"I bet ye can!" said the farmer proudly. "You can do 'bout anythin' ye want to, I guess. Well, what d'ye think the news is?"

"About —?" Cicely looked up quickly, her thoughts flying instantly to their inevitable goal.

The farmer nodded with a humorous twinkle. "That's right,— 'bout Cheltenham," he said shrewdly; he was well aware that Cicely's education had not progressed far enough to make her eyes brighten over the name of the next Presidential candidate. "Johnny jest sent me a paper. They're goin' to hev a new laboratory there; an' as near's I can make out, the folks that are givin' it are doin' it all on account o' Professor Ford."

"The de Mullens!" exclaimed Cicely. "They're giving a laboratory to Ro — to Cheltenham?"

"That's them," said the farmer. "Cough-drop folks."

"But I thought they had given it to Yale!" she said. "I thought when I — that is, I heard it was settled."

"Well, seems's if they changed the'r mind," said John Gibson. "Says here they give it on condition he gets made head o' the Department o' Science; 'an' this appointment,' it says, 'hes ben spoken of as a possi-

bility for some months, and is now supposed to be a definite fact.' My, wun't Johnny be tickled? But I do' know's he'll be any tickleder'n I am. That man's pretty young to get a reward like this, ain't he? P'raps you'd like to look at the paper; I'll leave it here." He laid the open sheet on the table, and tramped off to one of his many tasks.

Cicely sat staring at the words without seeing them. Roger the head of his department! Roger soon to have his laboratory! — the things that she had so much wanted for him, and had seemed to lose by her folly, all coming to him now that she had gone out of his life! A black despair settled upon her. Now indeed her case was hopeless. He would never need her again: his work, which he loved, had rewarded his devotion; and she, after wrecking his life as nearly as possible, had lost her place in it forever. She laid her head upon the paper, and closed her eyes.

She knew now for the first time that she had still harboured hope. What undreamed-of horror of desolation was this! Nothing remained in life, nothing. She hated Roger's success, hated the people who had helped him to it, hated his zeal which had made it possible. The books, the apparatus of his work, and the old coat he worked in,— all that took him out of her life, and lifted him into the serene impersonal world in which he was happy,— seemed endowed with malevolent personality to mock at her. "I wish I had my hands on them!" she said aloud, fiercely. "I'd *tear* them!"

And then, suddenly, came into her mind the picture

of Roger in the old coat, bending over his work, absorbed, content; and with it came a rush of tender tears. "My precious Badger!" she thought. "How he loves it! How happy he'll be, with everything that he wants at his hand! He'll work from morning till night, and never know he's tired. O darling Badger, take it, take it! I'm so glad there's something left for you that I haven't spoiled! And I'm glad I'm gone,—yes, I'm glad,—I'd rather never see you again than ruin your life. O Badger dearest, I do want you to be happy!" So she wept for a little while, and was somehow comforted.

The big clock in the corner struck three, and Cicely sat up, recalled to her surroundings. "I must hurry," she said to herself, "or I won't be done when Mrs. Gibson gets back, and then she'll never go away again." She set to work at the stockings, frowning and pursing her mouth over the difficulty of the task. "I wonder who did the stockings at our house?" she thought. "Hitty, I suppose. Poor Hitty,—think of the holes there must have been in all those silk ones of mine! . . . What a good soul Hitty was; and I never appreciated her, never,—except her conversation,—I will say I always did justice to that. . . . Miss Briggs is something like her; and she's a good soul too. . . . How many nice people there are, if you stop to notice. But none as nice as dear Mrs. Gibson,—bless her dear heart! I do hope she's having a good time." So, with busy mind and fingers, she passed the long afternoon; and when Mrs. Gibson returned at half-past five o'clock the pile of mending was done.

"Well, dear!" said Mrs. Gibson, hurrying in out of the fresh breeze with rosy cheeks. "How did ye get along?"

"Splendidly!" said Cicely, kissing her. "The mending's all finished. And did you have a good time?"

"Oh, I hed the *best* time!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson, her eyes shining like a girl's. "My, I do' know when I've hed sech a time. That libr'y,—well, I don't s'pose heaven itself could be much beautifuller!—marble pillars, an' vestibules all full of picters, an' books,—rows an' rows of 'em, right up to the ceilin',—I never see anythin' to equal it.—An' how we did go! Comin' home, we beat half the automobiles we see,—an' there! I s'pose it's wicked, but I couldn't help wantin' to beat 'em *all*. The only drawback was that you wasn't there. I kep' thinkin', 'Oh dear, if only Cicely was in this automobile, an' I was home darnin' them stockin's!'"

"Why, dear Mrs. Gibson," said Cicely, "I was just *enjoying* the stockings, because I knew you were having a good time! I had twice as much pleasure in having you go as I would have had in going myself."

"Cicely!" said the farmer's wife, stopping in her movement across the room. "Do you know what you jest said?"

"Why, that I was glad you had a nice afternoon!" repeated Cicely, surprised.

"No,—that you was happy in somebody else's happiness!" said Mrs. Gibson triumphantly. "Jest what you said this noon-time you didn't b'lieve. Now look at me and tell me true,—don't you b'lieve ther's better

ways o' bein' happy besides hevin' jest what ye want for yerself?"

Cicely stood still and considered, and remembered how glad she was that Roger should have his wish, and how it had warmed her heart to hear of her friend's pleasure: and a new and lovely light was born in her eyes, and lay trembling along the line of her mouth. "Oh yes, yes!" she said. "Much, much better!"

Mrs. Gibson smiled at her, through fond tears. "Cicely, dear heart," she said, "now yo're a woman."

XV

“ JOURNEYS END —”

“ WELL ! ” said Susan Briggs, invading the quiet kitchen like a shot from a cannon, “ here I am,— gone off, stayed off, an’ got back again, all in one week ! My stars, I ben doin’ so much I expected to find ye all ten years older, an’ ye ain’t changed a mite.”

“ Welcome home, Susan ! ” said Martha Gibson heartily. “ Set right down, an’ tell us all about it ! Did ye hev a fine time ? ”

“ Yes, do tell us ! ” echoed Cicely. “ How bright and jolly you look ! It does one good to have a peep at you.” Now that she had received her new vision, she was wonderfully wide-eyed for vicarious pleasure.

“ Well, sirs ! ” began the traveller, with great gusto, “ I jest wish’t you’d ‘a’ ben along to see the sights o’ the city ! I ain’t ben there for ten years, an’ I tell ye I wouldn’t ‘a’ b’lieved all I see if I hedn’t ‘a’ hed my own eyes with me. My land, them buildin’s are so tall now they made me feel’s if my legs wa’n’t no longer’n a caterpillar’s; why, ther’s some of ‘em ‘d made the new Methodist steeple look like a pancake, they would that. An’ the hats ! I thought that one you come here in was bad enough, Cicely ; but my soul, it’s *civilized* beside some I see there ! I see one woman that looked as if she

was carryin' round a ten-acre truck-farm, all loaded down with greens an' garden-sass; an' then the next one I see looked as if she'd got her head jammed in a coal-bucket, an' couldn't git it out without a boot-jack. Land, I must say, the more I see o' city women, the gladder I am 't I live in the country, where folks 'a' got some *sense!*!"

"Go on, tell us more!" urged Cicely, her eyes dancing. "Are the spring coats long or short? And what are the new sleeves like?"

"An' did ye get to any lectures?" asked Mrs. Gibson hungrily. "An' did ye see the new Art Museum?"

"Yes, I went to two lectures, an' I see the museum on purpose to tell you 'bout it," said Miss Briggs. "An' I heard some news, too,—'bout Cheltenham,— that I ben savin' for ye."

"Oh, what is it?" said Cicely quickly. "About the physical laboratory?"

"No, 'bout Marthy's Professor Ford, that she's so cracked on," replied Susan. "Sh'll I tell it now, or go on 'bout the sleeves an' the museum?"

"Oh, tell it, tell it!" said Cicely, uncontrollably impatient. "Is he well?"

"Why, so far's I know," said Susan, swelling with the importance of a newsbearer, "but what d'ye s'pose? His wife's up 'n' left him! Yes, sir,— went off last January with another feller, sure's yo're born!"

This information, instead of creating an uproar, was received in absolute silence. Cicely clenched her hands, and breathed as if she had been running, but kept her lips closed; and Mrs. Gibson, averting her eyes, looked out of the window with a sad and troubled face.

"Well, ye don't seem much stirred up!" said Miss Briggs, aggrieved. "I thought ye'd set up a holler, Marthy. What's the matter? Ain't heard it before, hev ye?"

"Why, yes, I hev," said Mrs. Gibson slowly. "Johnny wrote it to me quite a spell ago. I—" She made as if to say more, then changed her mind and closed her lips again.

"Well, I never!" said Susan indignantly. "Of all the stingy-mouthed folks! What ails ye, to be so tight with yer news?"

"Well, first place," said Mrs. Gibson, "I wa'n't sure but it might be a mistake, an' I didn't want to be the one to spread it. An' then, when I knowed it was so,—why—well, I think so much o' Professor Ford, I couldn't bring myself to talk to folks 'bout it. It seemed like — like paintin' the town fences with — I do' know — his heart's blood." She flushed with the difficulty of expressing so sensitive a feeling before so matter-of-fact an auditor. Cicely looked at her with eyes of dumb gratitude.

"My senses!" exclaimed Susan. "Yo're softer'n mush, Marthy! Other folks ain't sech 'fraid-cats, I can tell ye. It's ben town talk for months in Cheltenham, an' even in the city ther's lots knows all about it. I s'pose she went to Reno, don't you? They say she was brought up s'ciety, an' I hear that's what all them s'ciety folks do."

"How'd you hear 'bout it?" asked Mrs. Gibson, with some hesitation.

"Why, Jim Hilliard's folks told me," said Susan, ex-

pounding the tale with enthusiasm. "Their cousin Jonas's cousin Hitty Sparks was workin' to the Fords'; an' 'twas her see Mis' Ford an' this young feller elopin' away, with her own eyes. Ellen Hilliard, she says Hitty 'most cried herself sick over it; an' she ain't one to cry neither, Ellen says; but it seems she was dreadful took up with them Fords. Well, she stayed on quite a spell, keepin' house for Professor Ford: but presently she see what a scandal it'd be likely to make, her livin' alone like that with a single man, as ye might say; an' so she put it to the professor that she'd give him a month to git married again, or if not she'd hev to go. So the professor, he says, s'he, that if 'twas that way he guessed they'd hev to part, becuz he hedn't no notion o' marryin' again; an' so Hitty left come the end o' Feb'uary. She was dreadful sorry to go, but o' course a respectable single woman hes to consider the looks o' things."

"An' how does he manage now?" asked Mrs. Gibson.
"Did he get him another girl?"

"Well no, it seems not," continued Susan fluently. "Seems they're dreadful hard to come by in Cheltenham; an' besides, he was bound 'n' determined to sell his house, an' didn't want to make no permanent arrangements,—seems queer, don't it, when he bought it less'n a year ago?—he must be kind o' wambly. So Hitty, she got him a day-woman that was to come in once in so often an' clean an' wash up, an' then he was to git his own breakfast an' take his other meals out; an' Hitty, she got her another place, with a steady, respectable married couple. But Goody Gorham! she says the way that poor man lives is somethin' awful. Some days the

woman comes, an' some days she don't; an' if she does, ten chances to one she leaves things dirtier'n she finds 'em; an' if she don't, land knows *what* happens. An' she says he looks so thin, an' so forlorn —"

All this time Cicely had sat still and rigid, turned to stone by the violent conflict for self-mastery going on within her, nothing but her great eyes alive in her white face. But now she could bear no more. Gaspings, she rose to her feet and began to stumble across the room. "I — I must go upstairs," she said. "Please excuse me — I — I have something to do." With unsteady steps she hurried through the door and up the narrow stairway to her little chamber.

"I can't help it,— I can't help it,— I must go!" she told herself. "I must go if he hates me more than ever for it. *So thin — so forlorn —!*" She began to weep softly, setting about her hurried preparations. "Oh, my poor boy! my poor, precious Badger! I must go and take care of you, I must! I know you don't want me, dear,— and I don't wonder,— but oh, I can't bear this! 'So thin — so forlorn —'" The tears fell fast upon the things she was putting into her travelling-bag, and she fumbled for the fastenings blindly.

"Can I come in, dear?" asked Mrs. Gibson's voice at the door. "I've sent Susan away; I couldn't wait any longer."

"Yes, come in," said Cicely, with a quivering voice. "Mrs. Gibson, I'm going — going — on a journey." She took her hat from its shelf, and, with a quaint, unconscious obedience to habit, put it on in front of the mirror she could not see.

"Yo're goin'!" said Mrs. Gibson, without surprise.
"Then God speed ye, dear."

"Thank you," answered Cicely, sobbing. "Mrs. Gibson,—you've been so very, very good to me,—I ought not to keep it from you—any longer—I ought to tell you—"

"Don't trouble, Cicely," said the farmer's wife quietly.
"I expect I know."

"You know?" exclaimed Cicely, her eyes widening
behind their veil of tears. "You know—about me?
But how—?"

"I've hed my s'picions for a good while, dear, hearin'
you talk 'bout Cheltenham," answered Mrs. Gibson.
"An' then—to-day—I see yore face when she said
he was lonesome."

Cicely flew to the embrace of the waiting arms, laying
her wet cheek against the cheek of her friend. "Oh,
you do know!" she cried. "Oh, I'm so glad! Dear,
dear Mrs. Gibson,—you love him too,—you understand.
And my poor Roger—my poor precious husband,—he's
so miserable, Mrs. Gibson! I have to go and help him."

"Yes, dearie," said Mrs. Gibson, fondling her with a
sigh, "it's right ye should go. But—oh, little daughter,
how I'll miss ye!"

"But I'll be back soon,—very soon!" said Cicely,
stifling a sigh in her turn. "I'm only going to see how
he is."

"An' do you s'pose for one minute," inquired Mrs.
Gibson, smiling sadly, "that when ye've once seen him
ye'll ever think again 'bout us?"

"Oh, I'm not going to *see* him!" exclaimed Cicely.

"Not face to face, I mean. I'll just slip in and look at the house,— and get some one to take proper care of him,— and then stay overnight in some place where I can — just — catch a glimpse of him as he goes by. And then I'll come back. I ought to tell you," she added, flushing, but speaking out bravely, "that I nearly spoiled my husband's life before,— and there's no place in it for me now."

"No, I s'pose not," said Mrs. Gibson, with gentle irony. "An' you run away from him with another man, I s'pose, same's Susan said."

"Oh, no!" said Cicely, half-laughing through her tears. "That was Hitty's imagination. But Roger doesn't love me any longer, you see,— and — and so I can't stay with him."

"I see," said the farmer's wife, scoffing tenderly. "An' you don't love him neither, o' course."

"Oh, I love him, I love him!" cried Cicely vehemently. "I must hurry and go to him!" She slipped swiftly from the other's embrace, and, wiping the drops from her lashes, hurried into her coat and caught up her bag.

"Yes, go, dear," said the farmer's wife. "An' God bless ye. God bless my little daughter." They clung together again, kissing; and this time,— as inevitably in a parting between the generation that looks ahead and the generation that looks back,— it was the older woman's cheeks that were wet.

"I'll be back soon,— very soon," said Cicely, sighing.

"Mebbe," said the farmer's wife, trying to smile.

“ Good-bye, little daughter. I’ll love ye always. Good-bye.”

So Cicely parted from the home that had seen her new birth, without a pang save in the thought that she must soon come back to it again. But this time it was not selfishness that blinded her spirit’s eyes,— only the glory of the greater love that, for a while, hid the lesser.

§

The car that carried Cicely away from her husband and her home had seemed to go at a merciless speed that nothing could retard, widening the distance as swiftly and inexorably as if it had been the grim chariot of Death itself. Now the car that bore her back again over the same road had leagued itself with all the demons of delay, and either crawled like a torpid snail, or stopped altogether for interminable periods on the flimsiest possible excuses. But it was a radiant spring morning, and all the world was smiling: the trees were powdered with lightly-sprinkled green, the dark fields looked rich and fecund; and high in the branches the birds were busy at their dainty errands, chattering, choosing, planning. Cicely thought of that day of dreary winter when she had set forth through the muddy snow with winter in her heart, and at the thought became suddenly aware of the springtime she now carried within her. What a glorious day! What a dear, dear errand! What slow wheels, and what a hot-foot heart! What a beautiful, wonderful world!

And now all the road seemed alive with lovers. Boys and girls stood trysting under trees; in the village streets

men and maidens stopped each other and chatted with smiling, lighting glances; once the car slowed down in front of an isolated house while the motorman waved his cap at a window, and Cicely, peeping, saw a hand fluttering a secret kiss in response; and once an old couple, sitting near her in the car,—man and wife, clearly, for many years,—clasped hands and smiled mistily at each other, as they passed a little brook with willows and a mossy seat beside it. A world of lovers! Cicely felt a lump of poignant sympathy rise in her throat, and the warm tears gather to her eyes. Even if love was over for her, it was good that love still lived in the world.

So the long day drew on. As she had left Cheltenham in the winter twilight and come to her stopping-place at midnight of that other day, so now, when she had set forth in mid-morning, she came to her goal when the April shadows were growing long. She left the car at that pine-pillared spot on the lonely road where she had boarded it before, and, wing-footed with eagerness, sped at a breathless pace up the narrow street, and home.

§

At the sight of the little red house, however, a sharp pang of misgiving smote her. It looked bleaker and more wintry than when she had left it; last autumn's dead leaves lay thick upon the lawn; the brick walk, the flowerless windows, were dirty and neglected; and when she tried the door, it was locked fast. Her home had no welcome for her; she was shut out of Roger's house as out of his life. Dared she break her way in again, even

for a moment? Her heart failed within her, and all at once she was ready to turn and fly away as fast as she had come.

Yet she gathered her courage and determination with a steady hand. She had come to take care of Roger, and she would be a more pitiable helpmeet than ever if she ran like a coward before she had begun. She slipped around the house in the shelter of the shrubbery, trying the windows one after another; and presently, at the back, she came upon one that yielded to her touch, and raised it cautiously. Screened on one side by the thick, new-leafed lilac-bushes, and on the other by the projecting porch of the back door, she scrambled over the sill without much fear of observation, and found herself safe inside. It came into her mind, as she drew the sash down stealthily, that she was entering her husband's home like a thief, and she grew hot with shame, and then again cold with a new desolation.

But as she looked around her, all other thoughts were swallowed up in the shock of dismay to her new house-wifely perceptions. Dirt and desolation reigned everywhere. The little morning-room, which she had left so crisp and dainty, was like a soiled memory of a past pleasure; the curtains hung in dingy wisps, the furniture was filmed thick with dust, and on the floor the grey rolls of dust that Hitty called “ slut's-feathers ” rolled hither and thither. In the drawing-room,—once the prettiest setting for a pretty trousseau that heart could wish,—the sight of the cobwebbed lights, decaying flowers, and piano still bedaubed with the candle-grease

of the forgotten reception, made her wring her hands. "Oh, oh!" she cried. "How *can* they let him live like this? How *can* they?"

In the hall the stairs tempted her, and, though she feared to loiter, she stole up them on tiptoe. The unoccupied rooms, like the ones below, were thick with dust. Roger's room was so untidy that she could not trust herself to go into it, lest all her resolves of haste be overborne in spite of her. As she passed the door of her own chamber, an impulse seized her to see if that, too (which had been like a flower for fresh sweetness), had succumbed to the prevailing desolation: she put out her hand to the knob, and tried to turn it; and it stood fast in her hold,—locked now from the outside, as once she had locked it from within.

This discovery plunged a knife into her heart. "He wants to shut even the memory of me out of his life!" she cried to herself. "He can't bear to see even the place where I used to be. Oh, I must go, I must hurry,—what would he do if he should see me? Roger, Roger, I love you so, and you hate the very thought of me! Oh, I'll go quickly, dear, and not make you suffer any more."

Yet she lingered, straying from room to room like an uneasy ghost, unable to drag herself away. In Roger's study, on the desk, a handkerchief grimy with dust and a clean area among the papers showed a pathetic masculine attempt at house-cleaning; and putting the handkerchief, grime and all, into her pocket, she cried softly over the uncared-for homelessness of her man. Behind the door a further search revealed the old working-coat, shabbier than ever now, with all the buttons off, pipe-

ash burns down the front, and a frayed hole through the elbow; and over this her tears flowed faster still. “ My poor, poor boy! ” she sobbed. “ Oh, how forlorn you are! — I must go, I must go — but how can I, and leave him like this? ” And still kept weeping from room to room, and wringing her hands, and saying that she would go, and miserably staying.

At sight of the kitchen, however,— the floor littered with coal and cinders, the stove messy with burned food, the table full of soiled dishes,— her resolution gave out utterly. “ It’s no use! ” she cried. “ I can’t, I just can’t! I must take the risk. O Roger, my poor boy, to *think* of a kitchen like this! Oh, I’ve just *got* to put it right,— I just can’t go till I do.”

She had dashed the tears from her eyes and flung her hat and coat on a chair even while she made her decision, and stood, in the pink gingham dress she had never thought of changing before she left the farm, tucking up her sleeves over her white arms. “ I’ll hurry so fast he won’t have time to get back! ” she thought. “ It’s early yet; he won’t come for a long time; and when he does, he’ll think a Brownie has been here. He won’t know it was a Pixie! ” She looked around the kitchen with eyes that had begun to shine; pouncing by instinct on the broom in its corner closet, she swept the floor deftly; rubbed the stove with a wet cloth that sizzled on its hot, dirty surface; and then, piling the dishes neatly, washed the white table that Hitty used to keep so spotless, and filled the dishpan at the sink. As she did this, she noticed to her astonishment that she was singing.

"Why, I haven't sung in all these months!" she thought. "I wonder what makes me so happy?" Then, as she lifted the cups and plates her husband had used into the pan of shining water, a light broke upon her. "It's 'working for John!'" she told herself. "Mrs. Gibson said that was the best thing in life, and so it is. I never knew anything so sweet. I won't think about going; I'll make believe I'm going to stay here always,— helping my man."

So she worked, singing. For the first time in her life she knew the full happiness of loving service, and it seemed she could not glory enough in it. The twilight began to fall, and the shadows to gather in the corners, but she was too absorbed to remember time. And in the same way caution left her; just as earnestly as she had meant to hurry, so earnestly had she meant to keep as still as a mouse; but somehow her happy voice got away from her, and mounted into realms of sheer delight where she could not control it; and her hands, just as happy, rattled recklessly with the dishes in the pan. And so, when the tired step came slowly up the walk, stopped short in the hall, and then hurried quickly across the dining-room, she did not hear it,— or perhaps heard it without ever knowing, and took it for the sound of her own heart-beats.

"The King of Love my shepherd is,—
I'm working for my Roger,—"

she was singing joyfully, in a hymn of her own arrangement,— when the door opened, and Roger himself stood

upon the threshold, staring at her through the gathering gloom.

§

At sight of the real flesh-and-blood body of the subject of her dreams, Cicely fell with a crash from her rosy clouds, and stood gasping in the chill air of reality. Here was Roger,— Roger whom she did not mean to see, Roger who hated the thought of her! and here was she,— who had wrecked his life, and promised in spirit to stay out of it forever henceforth,— face to face with him! In the first revulsion from the shock of surprise, all the blood in her body surged up in an unreasoning flood of joy, crying out to him: but on the next heart-beat, seeing him stand there so stark and motionless, it ebbed away again into cold despair. So they stood for a long moment, gazing at each other, frozen into silence.

Then Cicely, summoning her resolution, spoke in a low voice. “ I — I didn’t mean you to see me, Roger,” she said.

“ It *is* you, Cicely!” exclaimed Roger hoarsely. “ What are you doing here?”

“ I’m just going,” said Cicely hurriedly. “ I never meant to stay until you came. You’ll believe that, won’t you?”

“ Yes, I’ll believe that,” said Roger bitterly. “ I don’t understand why you came at all.”

“ I’ll tell you why,” said Cicely, with sudden courage. Between her and Roger evasions were wicked; there should be nothing but truth. “ I came because I couldn’t

bear it any longer without seeing how you were. And when I got here there was so much to do for you, Roger, I just couldn't — I just couldn't make myself go."

Roger gave an astounded, inarticulate exclamation. "You — you couldn't go — because there was so much to do for *me!*" he muttered. "I'm dreaming. Let me see you, Cicely." He reached his arm out sidewise, groping for the electric button on the wall beside him, while he kept his eyes fixed on the place where Cicely stood.

"Oh, don't, Roger!" cried Cicely, afraid to trust herself with a better sight of him: but even as she spoke, the button clicked, and the room leaped into full light.

For an instant, taken by surprise, they both stood off guard,— Cicely, in all the homely beauty of her service, the sleeves of her little gingham frock tucked up to her elbows, the dish-towel in her hands, and her face, made sweeter and graver by these months of pain, instinct with longing; and Roger, white, haggard and worn, with a desperate hunger behind the amazement in his eyes. Sheer force of emotion held them both spellbound while they gazed. Then Cicely's hand, all unconsciously, caught at her labouring heart,— and at the movement Roger turned his face away sharply, with a low exclamation that was like a groan.

"Cicely!" he said. "If you're going, go quickly. I'm only a man — I can't promise—" He shut his teeth on the sentence, and she saw his strong hands clench.

"But — but Roger!" cried Cicely, stammering.

"You — you don't mean — you can't mean — you — you want me, Roger?"

"Want you!" cried Roger in a husky whisper.
"Want you —!"

Cicely clutched the table-edge for steadiness. "But it can't be!" she said. "All these months — all these long, long months — you never tried to find me — never made a sign —"

"How could I?" cried Roger, wheeling violently around. "God in heaven, Cicely, you were with him! I wanted you to be happy: and if I couldn't make you happy here, then the least I could do was to leave you in peace. But to hunt for you — to see you with another man — no, that's too much — I tell you I'm human —"

"With another man!" interrupted Cicely, staring. "Do you mean — oh, but you *couldn't* mean — O Roger, you did mean — with the boy! Roger, Roger — you could think that — you could believe it — why, were you raving? And I — all these months — oh, it's a joke, — a hideous, horrible joke —" Self-control crumpled down within her, and she sank into a chair and began to laugh hysterically.

Roger stared in his turn, all the colour wiped from his face even to the white lips. "Cicely!" he panted. "You weren't with him —? you never went with him —? Then why — why have we been apart all this time?"

"Because," said Cicely bitterly, steadying herself, "you knew the woman — the woman who used to be your wife — the one you called your soul — so well, that you believed the first silly falsehood you heard about her — and never asked anything more. And that — that was

possible in marriage, the one relation that ought to be all truth! We who were husband and wife—! Oh, what a mockery—what a mockery!"

"Cicely," said Roger hoarsely, "I never had your truth. I never knew your real self,—except for a few glimpses in those first days, and the sound of it sometimes in your voice. You went away from here,—just as you came,—a beautiful stranger."

Cicely raised her head to look at him fairly; and at the sight of the white, suffering face and big clenched hands the rising bitterness in her was swept away. How much indeed had she given him of her truth, she who had only lately begun to know her true self? and how much had she known of the truth of him, when she had believed all this time that he did not love her, and had submitted to learn of him from strangers? The humility which she had learned so newly rushed over her in a flood: and yet in the midst of it she felt a sudden, great pride; so much of truth was open to her now;—and this man,—this man of the plain, beautiful, tortured face and strong desirable arms,—was hers out of all the world!

"Roger!" she said. "Did I hear you say—you—wanted me?"

"Oh—Cicely—!" groaned Roger.

"Then," she said, with a little sobbing laugh, "why—why don't you take me,—Badger?"

There was a sudden cry, a sudden leap across the little kitchen, a sudden reaching out of hungry arms. Then,—weeping, laughing, clinging, heart on heart and cheek against wet cheek,—these two who had strayed so wide

and blundered so pitifully were born again; out of folly into understanding; out of earth into (it may be), heaven.

§

They spoke but little, and brokenly.

“ It’s a dream,” said Roger, his big arms crushing her.

“ Is *this* a dream?” asked Cicely, lifting warm lips to his.

“ O Pixie, Pixie, I’ve dreamed it so many times — and always waked —”

“ Badger, my Badger, my own beloved, you’ll never wake again, except to find that it’s all, all true!”

“ Tell it to me again, then, sweetheart,— sweet, sweet wife. . . .”

And later —

“ Badger, precious heart, if you loved me all the time, why did you lock the door —? ”

“ Oh, Pixie, your little sweet-smelling things — your empty room! Do you want me to be made of stone? ”

“ No, no, dear love,— not for me, not for me! ”

§

The dishes shifted, clinking, in the pan: and all at once Roger and Cicely were back again in the actual world,— the good, homely, beautiful, laughing, crying, workaday world. They both started, and Cicely slid from Roger’s embrace.

“ My dishes! ” she exclaimed in consternation.

“ Dishes! ” said Roger. “ Who’s been teaching you

to put your precious hands in dishwater? Leave them alone!"

"Not I," said Cicely. "That's gone on long enough. I'm going to wash them."

Roger caught her hands. "Look here," he said determinedly, "if you think I'm going to stand by and watch my wife work, you're mistaken. You're not to touch them: if somebody must, I will."

"Roger," said Cicely, looking at him wistfully, "do you want to turn me back again into a wax doll, when I'm just learning the happiness of being a woman?"

Roger looked startled. "I never thought of that!" he said, gazing at the new grave sweetness of her face. "Perhaps you're right. Only—*dishes!*"

"The dishes are just an emblem," said Cicely, releasing her hands, and turning on the hot water. "You see, I thought that life was an unlimited monarchy, with me on the throne and you on the footstool. But now I find it's a partnership, with me in one chair and you in the other. And that's enough to glorify even the dishes!"

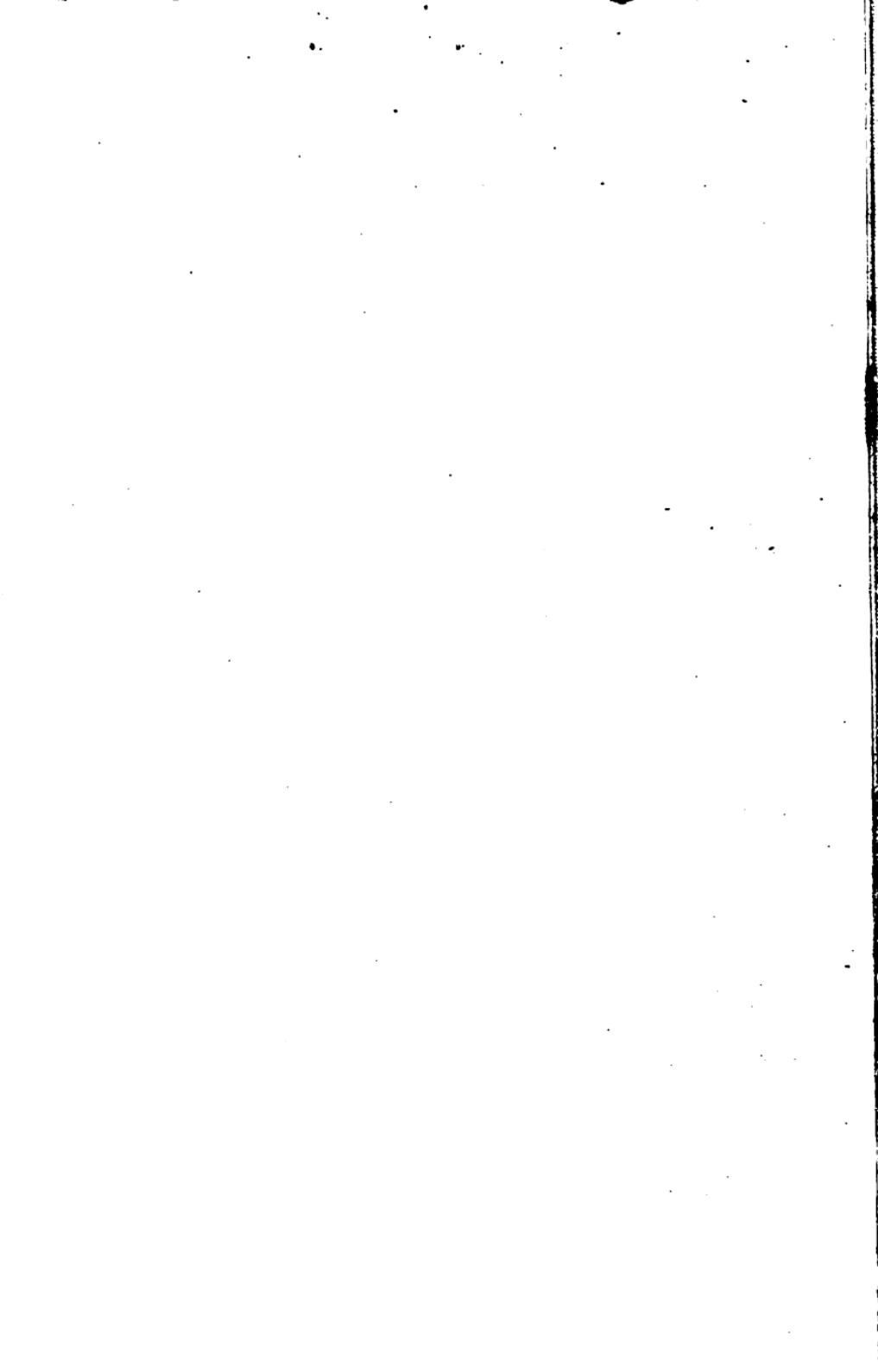
"Cicely," declared Roger, with conviction, "you're an Angel. A Heavenly Angel."

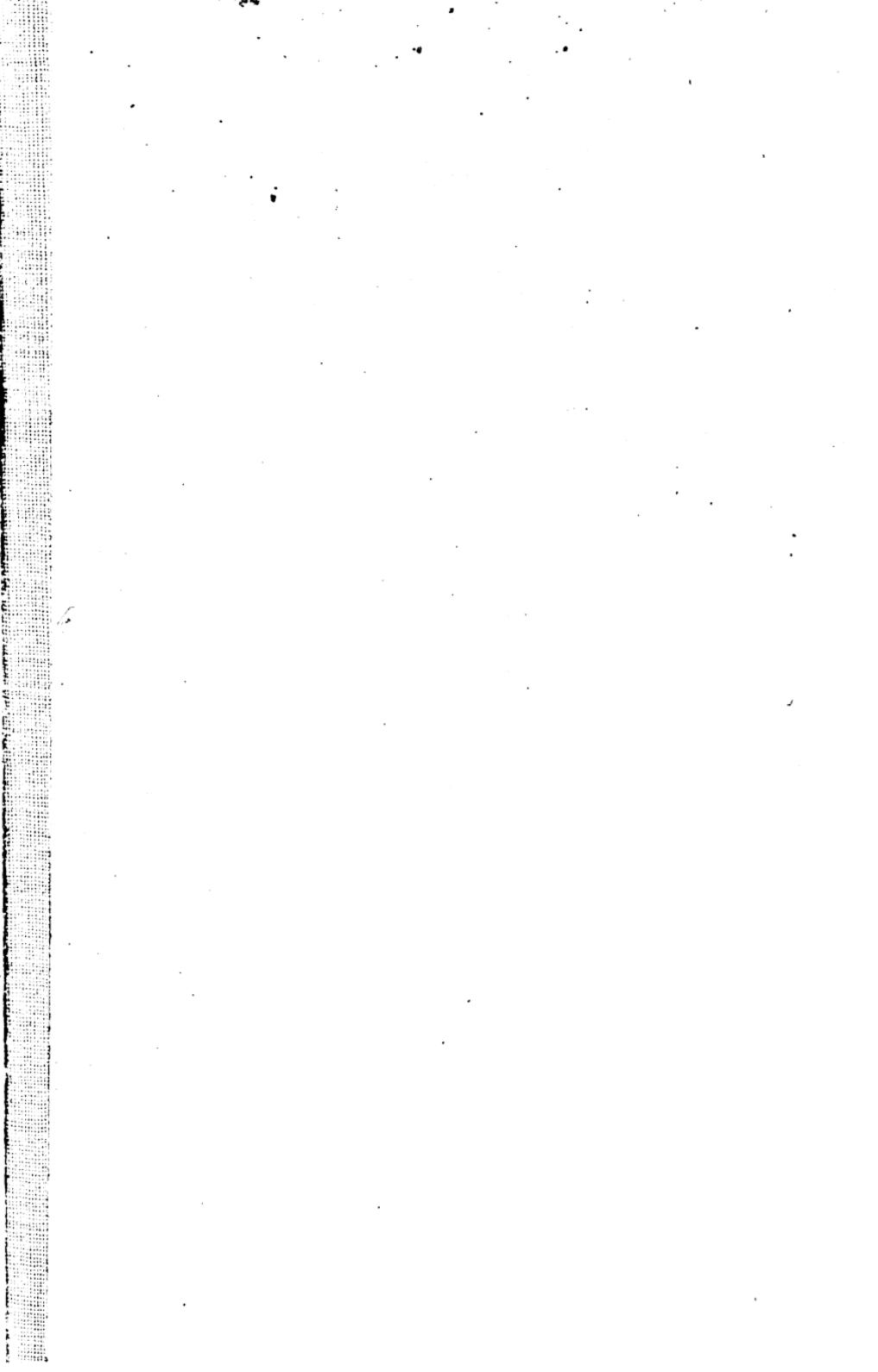
Cicely looked up at him sidewise with her wise, merry smile.

"Thank heaven you're mistaken!" she said. "Come, Roger, here's your towel."

THE END

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